

NOVEMBER 1996



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**plus an interview with  
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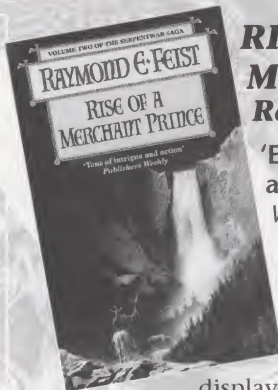
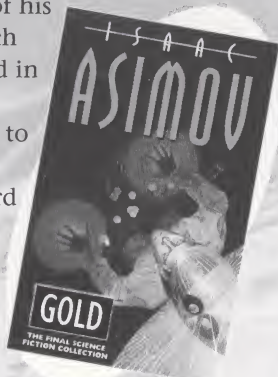
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# InterZone

November 1996

113

science fiction & fantasy

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Dear Editors:

Most sf and fantasy humour seems to be based on puns and stupid gags, and frankly, it leaves me cold. If I had known in advance that Molly Brown's story in your issue 111 was "humorous," I probably wouldn't have bothered to read it. I might not have bought the magazine. But unknowing and unwarned I plunged in, and when I come across something as rare as a science-fiction short that actually causes my stony face to break out in a smile (more than that, it actually made me laugh out loud!), I feel that it deserves some kind of acknowledgment, which is my reason for writing now.

Thank you for printing "Doing Things Differently," a genuinely funny story with not a pun in sight, that just might change my long-held view that (written) sf and humour don't mix. It had me chuckling at the end of a long, hard day, no mean feat I assure you.

**Ian Robertson**

Twickenham, Middlesex

Dear Editors

I'm afraid the text of "The Crystal-Man" (IZ 111) contains an inadvertent example of the collaborative process in action. At the very end Ilvador refers to himself as having been found on the doorstep in the snow. *Snow*? Amid the swirling, searing sands etc.? Readers must have been taken aback.

No, as I originally wrote my draft of this story (Jason's first having come first), I gave it the setting of the "hanquill mythos" tale "The Unmaker of Men" (referred to in the interview) which takes place in a far more northerly clime and draws some of its metaphoric resonance from imagery of the French Revolution, rather than the *Arabian Nights*, the East etc. Jason objected, made his case, and we agreed to move the setting to that of our other collaborative tale, "The Cloth Gods of Zhamiir," replete with searing sun, swirling sands, and all the rest. Or, it was my job to so move it. I'm afraid I missed a snow reference. It's a mistake, not some subtle device to hint at Ilvador's growing derangement or messiahdom.

Otherwise I am very pleased with the way you've presented the story. Russell Morgan's illustrations are splendid, evocative and witty at the same time. The magical pig in the middle of the title-spread is just *right*.

Also, I probably should have clarified something in the interview, where I say writers need to avoid H.P. Lovecraft's gentlemanly prejudice against commerce and make money elsewhere. When I say I "sell things," I am not referring to selling in the usual authorly way. I also engage in vulgar trade in used books, ancient coins, clever t-shirts of my own design (the most recent of which is an iconic representation of the Byzantine Stooges, Kurlios, Laurentios, and Mo), etc. I

# Interaction



even sold five computers once that I found at the end of someone's driveway while walking the dog. (Horrendously obsolete. I got \$25 for the lot.) Another button I wear, which Lelia didn't mention, reads CASHECTOMIES EXPERTLY PERFORMED. *Star Trek* fans insist I have Ferengi blood, though I lack the obvious earlobes. But no, when a writer friend of mine complained she needed her lawn cut, and offered me \$20 to do it, I actually did, in about an hour, which is good exercise and a good salary, but that one thing writers really dread... honest work. Such extremes I have gone to in the support of my art.

**Darrell Schweitzer**

Strafford, Pennsylvania

*Designer: Fret not, Darrell. Both editor and designer missed this particular blooper too, despite their numerous scrutinies. So you're in good company. And you should see our lawns!*

Dear Editors:

It is now a couple of hours since I returned from work. I'm tired after a 24-hour shift, comprising of evening duty, sleep in and day shift. I have a one-inch bruise on my shoulder caused by a human bite. I am ready to sit down and unwind, while the kids are reasonably quiet. Instead I am writing this while I still have the energy.

So, on my return from work I was pleased to see September's *Interzone* (no. 111) had arrived. A quick glance at the reviews showed me you hadn't condescended to review the new *Dr Who* – but I'd given up that hope months ago. So, after a good laugh from David Langford's "Ansible Link" I started "Interaction."

I agreed silently with Peter Crowther's letter on Chris Gilmore's review of *Cybercats* and really appreciated Nick Laury's letter on *Star Trek* and cyberpunk. But it was the Editor's comment after this letter which made

me put pen to paper.

I agree that *Star Trek* can be like a soap opera (though I doubt that it aspires to this). So what's wrong with good soap opera? But the line "a leap of the imagination – which may hurt the brain" finally made me mad enough to bring up a point which had irritated me in past issues.

Perhaps I missed the point, but I don't watch television science fiction for intellectual stimulation and I certainly don't read sf to gain a sense of intellectual superiority. I read it for pleasure, relaxation and escapism. Good new sf is hard to buy, so I find I can get an easy fix from television, film and *Interzone*. Therefore past discussion of what constitutes "real" sf, as opposed to pulp or some other sub-genre, seems to me to be the worst kind of intellectual snobbery.

It is a good story that counts, not what framework it has been set in. This intellectualization of science fiction is what may destroy it – putting it out of reach of people like me, who didn't take "A" levels or go to university. In the past I have received the impression that I am not worthy and should leave such things to those who understand such things. Attitudes similar to that all contribute to putting a distance between you and your readers.

I understand that your work is to write and read science fiction, and as such you need to define your frame of reference occasionally; but as a reader I want to be entertained. If the book makes me think as well then that is a bonus, but not a necessary one. I can forgive much in a book as long as the leap of the imagination required is rewarded with a good story – something I'm glad to say *Interzone* usually provides.

My main point is, dear Editor, don't take your work so seriously; remember you are also in the entertainment business. Insulting your readership doesn't make for good entertainment.

**Pam Powlesland**

Newton Abbot, Devon

*Editor: I'm sorry if my rather too flip-pant remark caused you offence. I actually like soap opera (EastEnders is my favourite), and when I said that "all TV fiction aspires to the condition of soap opera" I didn't necessarily mean it in a derogatory way. Soap operas are among of the few things that help bind our fragmenting societies together (people need people, people need gossip – it's like apes' "grooming"). But science fiction, whether or not it can be described as "intellectualized," is a literature of ideas, and that's its peculiar strength; it is also, often, about the confrontation with the unknown, the non-human, the transcendent, the Cold Equations of space and time. For these reasons, good sf is different from soap opera (and most TV fiction). Good*



*sf rarely has been, and is unlikely ever to be, the most popular form of fiction. I don't glory in that in a masochistic or holier-than-thou fashion – I'm rather sad about it – but I just take it as an inevitable fact.*

Dear Editors:

Oh, bloody hell – whatever next? Over one third of “Interaction” (issue 111) devoted to a complaint by Peter Crowther concerning Chris Gilmore’s unfavourable review of a book (Garry Kilworth’s *Cybercats*) – a book the complainant hasn’t even read? Really chaps, I know this is a magazine of science fiction and fantasy but a grip on some kind of perspective might be a fine idea, particularly when this meta-critique finally grinds to a halt at almost three times the wordage of the offending piece!

And no, I haven’t actually missed the various points contained in this well thought-out and entertaining slagging-off – but there is one thing I’d like to mention in passing: as a general rule, and beyond the confines of the small press, a reviewer has little or no control over which books he or she is expected to review for a magazine. Editors choose. Reviewers grit their teeth. It’s a dirty job but someone’s got to do it.

**Anne Acaster**  
*Maidstone, Kent*

Dear Editors:

I’d like to take issue with some of the points raised by Nick Laury (IZ 111) regarding *Babylon 5* and cyberpunk. I do believe that *B-5* is unique in its five-year story arc. Agreed, it isn’t the only American TV show to have a continuing narrative, but it differs from, say, *Star Trek: Deep Space 9* in (at least) two ways.

Firstly, in *B-5*, there is central narrative thrust about the war with the Shadows, which colours to a greater or lesser degree many non-arc stories, often in subtle or off-hand ways (e.g. in a season-one episode, we see Garibaldi reading a newspaper with a headline referring to unrest on Mars, foreshadowing the events leading to the declaration of martial law in season two).

On the other hand, *ST:DS9* often makes use of a number of continuing story threads (one or two of which actually progress stories from *Star Trek: The Next Generation* episodes), but there is not the same integrity in these threads’ development.

Secondly, and more importantly, *B-5* has a five-year story arc. J. Michael Straczynski has planned the narrative over five seasons and (so long as the network will buy it!), the story will continue for five years... and no longer. Whereas *ST:DS9* will probably continue for as long as the network will buy it: maybe four years, maybe five, maybe seven.

The contrast between *B-5* and *ST:DS9* seems to me strongly reminiscent of the contrast (sometimes remarked upon by *Interzone*’s reviewers) between trilogies, quartets, quintets, etc., where it’s clear that the author is telling a single story over several volumes and those where the author is putting off the resolution by using “intraquels” which move the protagonists around but don’t further the fundamental plot.

The difference manifests itself in the attitudes of those who watch the various series. Among my colleagues there are about six of us who watch *ST:TNG*, *ST:DS9* and *B-5*, and we often enthusiastically discuss episodes from each, but it is *B-5* which consistently generates the most excitement, the most avid discussion and speculation, and the most frustration when an episode’s been missed (and a subsequent fervent search for someone who’s still got it on video).

(Now if there really is a series which has a problem with hype, isn’t it *The X-Files*...?)

Nick Laury says that a cyberpunk character who “complains that his data jack is shielded by ice and he’s got into a major net even though he’s only using a close-wired array” just turns him off... which is fair enough: *chacun a son gout*. But on the other hand, he professes to be quite happy “when O’Brien ... mutters something about using the warp drive to create a stasis bubble.” It’s just technobabble in either case!

So perhaps Nick’s feelings here come down to his preference for one future over the other. Now, I agree that the *Star Trek* future is in many ways attractive, but I believe that cyberpunk novels can portray a close and attractive future. Neal Stephenson’s *Snow Crash* springs to mind. People still eat pizza, drive mini-vans (and park them close to the kerb to avoid getting dented!), go to open-air gigs, etc. And the technology is pretty nifty: sensational planks (skateboards to the uninitiated), and a cool VR continuum (where you can duel with Japanese swords! yes!), which makes Internet Relay Chat look like something from the Stone Age!

But perhaps *Snow Crash* is atypical. Perhaps the future portrayed in, say, *Neuromancer*, or *Strange Days*, or *Metrophage*, isn’t so attractive. But then the present portrayed in, say, *Trainspotting*, or *Reservoir Dogs*, or *Se7en*, isn’t either. It seems to me that many stories in whatever genre or medium must take place in a grim setting to satisfy the author’s premise or to provide a necessary backdrop – Chandler’s “mean streets” – for the human conflict which is at their heart.

(Returning tangentially to *B-5*, part of its appeal is surely the vicarious involvement in a struggle against an

“evil enemy.” I for one sometimes feel that I’d rather be a part of that, to be involved in truly momentous events, than working nine to five ... then I reflect on my father’s involvement in such a conflict 50 years ago...)

Another important aspect where cyberpunk is truly closer is that technological advances such as VR, the Internet, neural-net processors, and nanotechnology will change the rest of our lives and shape the lives of our children no less than, say, television, the motorcar, the silicon chip, and pharmacology have changed and shaped our lives over the past 50 years.

I make no pretence that cyberpunk novels are predictive in any but the broadest way, but they do explore possible futures and the ways in which people might be exploited or empowered by new technology. And if such science fiction does force us to make brain-hurting leaps of the imagination, then we can only be better able to cope with the changes in our real lives which will come. Maybe even warp drives (or jump gates?) and transporter beams...

**Dr Anthony R. Allan**  
*Harrogate, N. Yorks.*

Dear Editors:

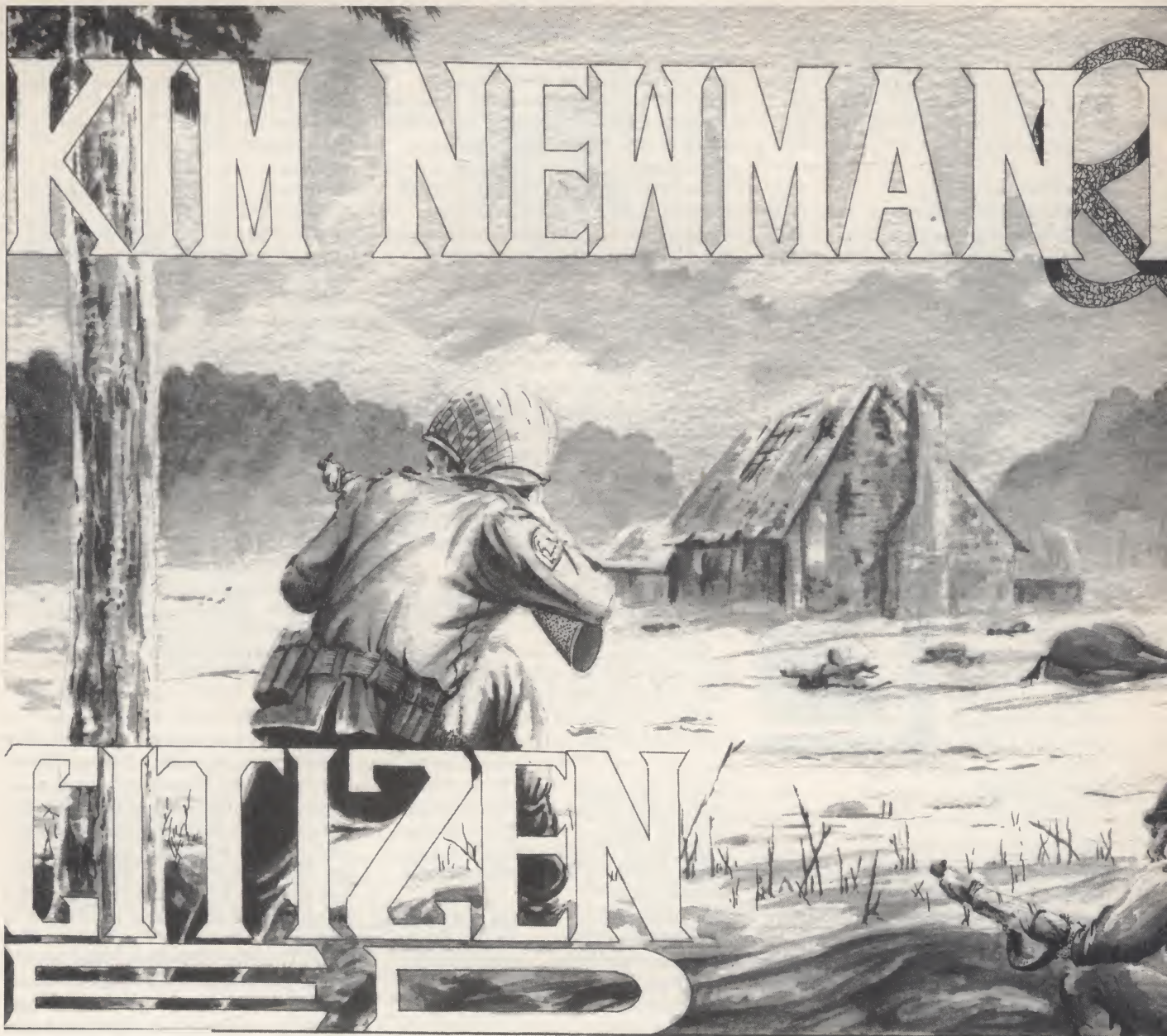
We recently had a whole Bank Holiday Monday evening of *Star Trek* on British television. The chance to sit back and enjoy classic *Trek* moments, and listen as the morals of the Federation of the 25th century meets the technology of the 20th century – or is that the other way around? (I can never be quite sure.) So, along come the classic TV sniggers – remember Channel 4’s report on last year’s Glasgow Worldcon? Well, presenter-comedian Craig Charles was back to do the fill-in over tacky budget starships and graphics. We even had a game-show of *Trek Trivia*, which I am sure was intended to prove how weird Trekkies are, rather than to illuminate the general public as to how disturbingly normal they really are!

But there, outstanding in the middle of this collective navel-gazing, one pundit came out with the comment I and several others (our esteemed Editor being another) proclaimed months ago – that space opera is a continuation of the Western TV series. Hence, as Nick Laury rumbled away in *Interzone* 111, they drink beer and talk about sport because they have to! It’s what the cattlemen of *Rawhide* did round the campfire in the dull episodes. Except they tended to drink coffee and talk of home. Transpose Rowdy Yates, Gil Favor and others into skin-tight Lycra. Put them in a vast expanse of flashing lights, and – bingo! – *Starhide: The Next Generation*.

Live long and soap opera! I’m off to write my next *Trek*-incarnation story, about the crew of a freighter that delivers livestock.

**Craig Turner**





**N**ow Ed's gone and died, they're going to put up a memorial in the park. Order of Debs, First Class. Two-Time Hero of the United Socialist States of America. Loyal Servant of the Party Agricultural Committee for Waushara County. Saviour of Plainfield, Wisconsin. A bronze of his head, topped off with that plaid hat half-sideways like he always wore it. It'll be sited by the bench where he used to sit. It's a bus stop, but I never saw him ride the bus.

Ed would wait for someone – a middle-aged or elderly woman, for preference – to sit by him, and just yap at them. Bore 'em stiff, mostly.

Sometimes, he'd kill 'em.

He had his little set phrases, all starting with that "ayup" sound that announced he was going to say something. "Ayup," he'd go, "life's like a joint of meat. You can carve it any which way you like, but you'll never know how bloody it is 'til you cut to the bone."

No, I don't know what he meant either. I have some ideas. None pleasant.

You want to hear the story of Edward Gein, Socialist Hero? Ask around and all you'll get is what's in the

pamphlet. It'll tell you how he won the Medal for Marksmanship, how he got everyone through the Big Freeze of '56 with his "cured meats," how he took the state prize for American Craftsmanship with leatherwork, how he was always *soooo* nice and polite to his old ladies.

Ask me, and I'll fill in the footnotes: he was a degenerate, murdering, corpse-fucking piece of filth.

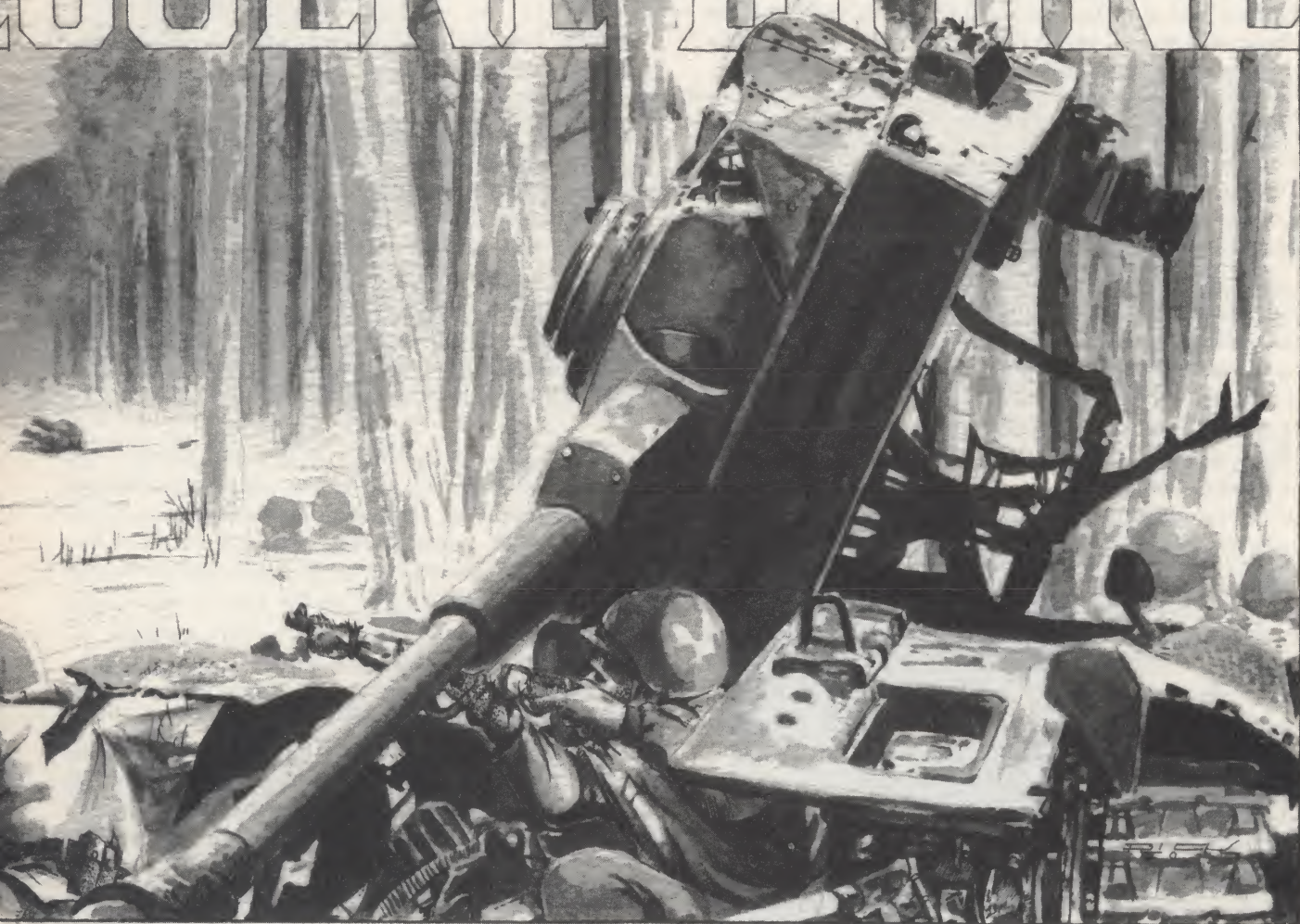
That doesn't mean he doesn't deserve his damn statue.

For me, it started in the War. I know, I know. You want to hear about Plainfield, but you're getting my story. My angle on it. It was in the War that I was set on the course that ran me smack into Mama Gein's Best-Loved Boy. So I have to tell you about it. Bear with me, and it'll come straight.

I was in Yurup. Battle of the Bulge. We raise ten-foot snowdrifts in these parts, but that was the worst winter I ever spent. Somehow the prospect of getting killed or coming home minus a testicle made it seem a lot colder. Not a one of my unit came back with all his fingers and toes. I'm missing my left little toe. It



# EUGENE DYERNE



Illustrations by Rick Dawson

still itches like little ants are swarming all over it. Phantom pain.

The Allies were all mixed in at the Bulge. Normally, we stuck our own sectors of the line to stop us killing each other by mistake (or not), but when Adolf's last desperate push came through in December of '44, Brits, Yanks and Russkies all got thrown into it together. Tommies, Ivans and American officers all had boots and gloves fit for high-ranking Party officials. They damn well hung onto their frozen digits. And their ears. That's what started a lot of the complaining you heard in the '50s. Boots and gloves.

Before the War, Capone came on the radio and said, in decadent capitalist countries, only plutocrats got decent food and clothing. In Yurup, a lot of us saw that wasn't the way it was. The lowest latrine-scraper in His Majesty's Forces was as well-equipped as an American officer, and a damn sight better than any GI south of a Second Lieutenant. We came back with the feeling we'd been lied to, and didn't much like it.

So there we were, a single company of the 83rd (Edward Bartlett) Infantry Brigade. Charles H. Marx only knows where the rest of the battalion got to in all

the confusion, but our orders were to stand and fight. We were lined up along a big clearing somewhere in the Ardennes forest with a road running through the middle, a road along which, we were assured, a Panzer division would be coming before too long.

Problems, problems. Like digging yourself a foxhole in frozen ground with army-issue entrenching tools that fold up like sheet lead if you actually try and use them for entrenching. There's a battalion of Brits to the right of us so we asked them to extend some fraternal assistance, but they just told us to "fack orff" and not disturb them while they were busy drinking tea and bellyaching. So then one of the guys went over to the Ivans on our left flank and, in fluent sign language, requested the loan of some spades. They didn't say much, they just came on over with picks and shovels and helped us dig in, gave us some vodka and a bag of rice and smiled a little. They were just kids, 16-18 years old, like my brother Jim, who was just dead in the Pacific Theatre. Nice kids.

All the while, we could hear artillery and small arms in the distance, but we didn't get our own sniff of Kraut for another six hours or so.



Trying to guess the big picture, I assume we were up against an infantry unit that had gotten itself lost. They just settled themselves at the other side of the clearing and popped off at us with mortars and small arms. They didn't have any tanks or anything. In the big picture, it was chickenshit, but that's not how it felt at the time.

There was a stone building in the middle of the clearing and the Brits, who had the highest-ranking officer in the area, had volunteered some of the Ivans to occupy it with a couple of their heavy machine guns. The Krauts softened it up with mortars then tried to rush it with grenades and all the supporting fire they could muster. Ten minutes later, the building was half a building, but the Krauts ran off leaving half a dozen of their comrades lying roundabout, groaning or screaming. The poor Ivans inside were doing the same.

I'd seen it once before when we were slogging through Normandy. A kind of paralysis sets in on both sides. They just stand in their foxholes, half-heartedly shooting each other's shadows, kinda disgusted by what they're doing and kinda terrified to do anything that'll make it worse. So they just wait for a superior officer, or some tanks or airplanes or bad weather – anything at all, really – to come along and change the situation without them actually having to make any decisions. That's how it was in the forest that afternoon.

We none of us gave a hang about the wounded Germans, but those poor Russian kids who'd given us vodka and dug our nice safe holes for us, well... We could hear them shouting. The army-issue phrase book was full of helpful sentences like "I am not interested in your black market goods" or "the matter must be referred to a superior officer." None of us knew what "help, my leg has been minced up by a stick-grenade" sounded like in Russian.

Then, someone did decide to do something. Captain Cooney, our political officer, told me to get over there and check them out. His Old Man was one of Capone's beer buddies, and he had been promised a position well away from the fighting, but there was a SNAFU and he found himself stuck in the field with a bunch of half-frozen, all-the-way-shit-scared GIs who, given the choice, would sooner have shot him than Hitler. Our radio was out and Cooney wanted to requisition theirs so he could squeal for Daddy to haul him out of dangleville. So, I was volunteered to squirrel across open ground, ice chunks crawling into my clothes, bullets spanging around my ass. Turned out the Ivans didn't have a radio. What they had was shrapnel wounds, bullet wounds and limbs crushed by fallen masonry.

So, with a little supporting fire from my buddies and from the Russians next to us – and none from the Brits, who I think were taking a tea-break – I hauled the four Ivans who were still alive out of the house. The third time out, I took a Schmeisser slug in the shoulder but didn't feel it 'til a while after I'd gone in again to haul the fourth. My whole body was like a side of frozen beef. The bullet just thumped into solid meat. Later, it hurt like hell.

I don't want to make myself out a hero. I did what I did because I was too scared not to. Lot of guys got

killed because they couldn't bear for their comrades to see how chicken they were. Lots more because the habit of taking orders, especially from assholes like Cooney, was ingrained too deeply. When I unfroze, it turned out I had a wound which would mean pain 85 out of every 100 days for the rest of my life.

Two of the Ivan kids made it. One sent me Easter cards for years, when they got through the censors. I had to write and ask him to stop: back in the '50s, mail from Russia marked you down as a counter-revolutionary and got you on the shitlist. Easter cards got you marked as a superstitious reactionary, which was another shitlist. Naturally, the two were rigorously cross-referenced. That was what the USSA's first computers were invented for.

I also received some Russki medal that got my name on the master-shitlist underlined in neon. Cooney got a commendation for Fraternal Gesture Heroism, and a transfer to the General Staff, where he spent the rest of the War trotting around behind Patton with a Zippo lighter. Inside track for advancement within the Party, you understand.

My red badge of stupidity was enough, when I was shipped home, to win me a sympathy appointment. Plainfield made me Deputy Sheriff Joe Costa. Might not sound much, but it was better than the six-foot Victory Plots a bunch of my friends and relations wound up in. It came with a cabin on the edge of the woods; not much more than a stove and a cot in a shack, but I wasn't sharing with five others like most people.

If I had known Ed Gein was waiting for me, I'd have jumped ship and swam back to the War.

They had a parade for me. High schoolers in Junior Pioneer uniforms, coonskin caps and all, marching past, holding banner-sized tapestries of a heroic Capone, scar turned away from the weavers.

I still had shellfire ringing in my ears.

I was 24 years old, and sole survivor of my male graduating class. One thing Capone said that wasn't a lie was that the King and the Tsarina had been determined to fight the Axis until there wasn't an American left standing. Yurup was bad enough, but the Pacific was the Big Betrayal. Remember, Russia had the Bomb in mid-'45 but didn't drop it until Fall. By then, 75,000 USS invasion troops had been killed fighting ditch-to-ditch, town-to-town on the Japanese mainland. 6,000 Americans died in Hiroshima and Nagasaki, along with no Russians and no Englishmen. I've never been much of a goodthinkful socialist, but when the Limeys and the Ivans got their asses whipped in Indochina, I cheered for the North Vietnamese and Vietcong. Only Party-minded thing I ever did was go door-to-door raising Fraternal Funds for the Indochinese.

Ed wasn't at the parade, but his Mom was. Augusta Gein was still alive. It was in '45, just before the Total Victory. She didn't last out the year. She was a Lutheran and thought we should have been on the Germans' side. But she saw her duty and baked me a cake, cried and gave me a leaflet about the perils of sexual incontinence and masturbation. I don't believe Augusta remembered which of the kids I had been.



Very few did. My Old Man sometimes called me "Jimmy" and promised to take me out after deer come spring.

After the Bulge, I never wanted to hold a rifle ever again. Even before the War, it was Jimmy who had dreamed of an 18-point buck on the wall in his half of the bedroom. I was never sold on the idea of shooting things dead for no particular reason. But in these parts, that's like publicly espousing the cause of counter-revolution.

Augusta Gein was cracked, but no more so than half the biddies in town. She and Ed's Pop ran a collective farm out in the boonies. When Gein Senior pegged out, she ran it with her son, Eddie. Thanks to Frank Spellman's "agricultural reforms," the place nearly came apart in the 1930s. But the War put land at a premium, and the collective almost thrived for a while. Raised hogs, mostly.

But the Gein Place was basically the Waushara County Slaughterhouse.

In the USSA, outside the cities, the dollar is a worthless piece of paper. Currency is something you can eat. Out here, they still use the old name for the Communist Party. The Farmer-Labor Party.

In the 1930s, before they purged Spellman, the collectivized farm system all but collapsed. In the mid-West, everything turned to dust. That dragged down the rest of the set-up all over the place. Kids like me were raised on short rations. I grew up on a dairy farm, but didn't taste butter for ten years until a Tommy swapped me a "bully beef" sandwich for my steel helmet at a field hospital in Bastogne.

When the time came, we were supposed to take our animals out to the Gein Place. After his Old Man died, Ed did the slaughtering, and Augusta – a Party member, naturally – decided how meat resources be allocated, which meant keeping the prime cuts for her family and cronies, and shipping the rest off to the cities where other Party officials served them to their friends. In return, we were given scrip redeemable at the Party store in town.

Once, when Jim let off a cherry bomb in the outhouse, the Old Man threatened to haul him out to the Gein Place and turn him over to Ed and his sledgehammer and cleavers. By rights, Jimmy should have got a whipping, but Pop was so appalled by what he had said but not meant to that the kid was let off. I wonder now if Pop hadn't had some idea. He died in '49 of the tuberculosis, so I can't ask him.

If the business of America is butchery, then Ed Gein was Our Killer. Our Greatest Killer.

Everyone hereabouts had to kiss up to Augusta Gein, hoping for scraps. Occasionally, she would allow a few chickens to escape the coop around Thanksgiving, Revolution Day or Christmas. You know, that made folks hate her more. She was showing them the power she had.

The whole town turned out for her funeral. The Party Committee, in full uniform, arranged for a Junior Pioneer Corps team to fire a salute over the grave. Ed insisted he be among their number; some say he brought down a duck with his shot, and gave it

to a poor family.

I was there, in my new Deputy's uniform with the shirt that almost fit and the tin star. When the volley was fired, I threw myself behind a couple of grave-markers and had to be restrained. I was trying to pull my piece and return fire. The rifle-cracks took me back to Yurrup.

I was embarrassed, but Ed gave out a grin that was creepily friendly. His whole world had died with Augusta, but he didn't seem upset by my foolishness at the funeral. Though I was having my own fit, or maybe because I was off my mind, I saw then that he was a crazy person. I could have sworn that he was still with Augusta, looking around for her approval. Maybe he was nice to me because he saw and heard things that weren't there too.

After the funeral, he laid on a barbecue and everyone in town had at least a taste of meat. For some of the kids, it was the first time. He talked about Ma as though she was just inside the house and would be out in a minute. She was, he said, "a good person," and always came to chat with him in the evening as he was going to sleep. He went around playing up to his Mama's cronies on the Party Ladies' Committee, insisting that they eat up, have second helpings.

"Ayup," he kept saying, "put some meat on your bones."

The desecrations started in 1947. They were never a mystery. Every time some grave was dug up and bits of a corpse went missing, Ed Gein had just been visiting his mother. He always had a shovel with him in his pick-up.

Sheriff Truman and I went out to the cemetery a couple of times, mostly at the request of grieving relatives. The caretaker knew better than to call the Sheriff's office.

The job almost never called for what you might think of as detective work. You know, if there was a bar-fight and someone got stabbed, it was a question of finding out which one of the brawlers was a Party member and letting him off for defending himself against an unprovoked attack or nailing the other guy for hooliganism. In the case of missing foodstuffs from the Party store, Harry Truman always assumed someone who needed to eat pretty badly was doing so and shifted reports around until the matter was dropped. If an official really put pepper on his ass, he'd throw Elmer, the town parasite, into the pokey for a few weeks and write him up as the pilferer. Elmer kinda liked getting two square meals a day for nothing, so everyone was happy.

Out at the cemetery, we didn't need Sherlock Holmes. There were the dug-up graves. There were the empty coffins. And there were the tyre-tracks.

Several times, we had this conversation with angry relatives.

"Mama," or "Grandma" sometimes, "she's gone. Someone took her."

"There's evidence of grave-tampering, certainly. And there are tyre tracks."

That would bring them up short.

"Yes," Sheriff Truman would say, slowly in case they



were too preoccupied to think it through, "whoever did this certainly had a truck."

Back then, most folks got around by horse and buggy. Gasoline was harder to come by than Pope's piss. Anybody who had a car on the road was connected. And anybody who had a truck was a made man!

Usually, about then, the complaint would be dropped.

After a couple of years, and some really bad ones – just-dead folks missing, or worse still, found with holes in them, holes full of semen – it got so my shoulder nagged me so badly that I had to do something. The worse things got, the worse my wound played up.

One day Harry Truman just upped and disappeared.

Since he had not officially been discharged from office and no one wanted to ask where he had gone, Truman had to remain Sheriff. But I had to do his job.

About this time, someone dug up the corpse of my Great Aunt Effie, put a ballgown on it and wired it to the statue of Plainfield's lone socialist hero like the pair of them were dancing. The monument was our sole civic ornament, to a local boy named Jim Boon who'd been wounded in the Spanish war of 1898 and who'd been sweet on Effie. One day, he shot the no-good son of one of the local plutocrats for bothering Effie. He was hanged for it. When the town was looking around for a Revolutionary hero, someone remembered Jim Boon and the local party committee bought the statue from a monument dealer over Madison way. The statue was actually a representation of Joe Hill, but that line was discontinued after Hill was purged, so they got it for a couple of dozen eggs and the price of the rail freight.

I don't recall as any of this bothered Aunt Effie, who remained a spinster all her life, but now here she was doing the fandango with Jim/Joe, and she was family, dammit.

My shoulder hurt so badly I had to grip my belt for two hours to keep from screaming. People thought I was about to pull my gun.

I knew I had to pay a call on Comrade Gein, Butcher.

The other deputy, Lou Ford, was a Party snitch, so I went out to the Gein Place on my own. The gas ration had run low, so I couldn't use the Sheriff's vehicle, but I had a horse handy. I always figured Champion would be a lot more use in a crisis than Lou Ford.

Out in the woods, alone on a horse, occasionally startling a deer, your breath frosting the air, you can sometimes forget the shitpit. That's why you still find so many people living alone in log-cabins all over the boonies. America could be a hell of a country if enough people were shot dead.

I could sense Champion didn't want to go near the Gein Place. He dragged hooves for the last two miles, ankle-dredging through the fallen leaves. I guess animals talk to each other, and Champ knew that very few things of the four-footed persuasion ever got to come back from Eddie Gein's back-barn.

Usually, you can tell if a farmer is high in the Party. Their places are newly-painted and have shining machinery, like you see in the movies, around the

yard, with the lesser members of the "collective" there to do all the work. The Gein Place wasn't like that. When you first came on it, you thought "well, this is where the Gein Dump is, but where does he keep the farm?" And he worked alone, getting bloody all by himself. This was a collective of one.

He could have used his position to second workers from the other collectives, and sat back on the porch getting fat on jerky, fiddling his quotas. Instead, he spent so much time on his slaughter that he didn't bother much with tidying up.

Of course, the place stank like a week-old battle-field in August. There were bones – mostly animal – all over the place, like a crunchy carpet, and hides nailed up on the walls. Everything was streaked with dried blood. There was a pile of cow skulls on the porch, heaped around a cheap concrete statue of Eugene V. Debs. A side of rotting meat was arranged before it, like an offering at an altar. First, my stomach heaved, but then I was thinking, "what a waste!"

Champion whinnied and reared as I hitched him to the rail on the porch. Somewhere, a mechanical saw was hacking through something. It wasn't the high whine of a buzz-saw through timber. I figured it for one of those newfangled chain affairs, and it was encountering different levels of resistance all the time. Something hard here, something sinewy there, something soft further along...

My shoulder jolted like I'd been shot.

I called out for Ed. The sawing continued. I thought about taking out my gun and executing the bastard child there and then. If he hadn't been Farmer-Labor, I might have been able to cover it. Blamed counter-revolutionary elements. But fat folks in Chicago would miss their Sunday joints, and the goddamn Federal Bureau of Ideology would be all over the show.

I walked over the bones to Ed's barn.

It hadn't been a barn for decades. But people didn't like to call it by its right name. It was the Killing House.

Inside, something screamed as a saw cut into guts.

Mama Gein was dressing a live deer with a chainsaw. Charlie Marx only knows how Ed had roped a 14-point buck, hog-tied it and hauled it up on a meathook. Now, his dead mother was standing under the screeching beast, scraping at its sides with a chainsaw like a Mexican child battering a piata. If you've never heard a deer screech, you don't want to. Instead of candies, the deer was dropping apple-sized gobbets of flesh and arcing squirts of blood.

Augusta Gein, you will recall, was dead. But here she was. I recognized the dress she was buried in, under the red sunflowers of drying deer blood, and her leathery face was unmistakable, despite the heavy stitches holding it together where the cheeks had split. Her hair was unbound and hung down her back.

I drew my Colt and shot the ceiling. I wasn't firing a warning; I was trying to get the dead woman's attention.

She turned away from the deer and let the saw choke down.

Her cheeks cracked again and she tried to smile.

My gun was poked up in the air. My shoulder was



on fire. My phantom toe, the one that had been frozen off in Europe, was a white-hot knot of pain.

Augusta's face broke across like a mask. The underside of her skin was raw and red.

Under Mrs Gein's face was her son, Ed.

It wouldn't have been so bad if it was just the face and dress, but Ed was wearing more of his Mama. He had skinned her, and fit himself inside. She had been a big woman, so he fit easily. There was rough stitch-work down the backs of her legs like stocking seams, and down her arms.

He had turned his mother into an all-over suit.

"Ed," I said. "I think we've got a problem here."

The deer kicked and died, a gush of blood bursting from its throat, pouring onto Ed's jubilant, radiant face like gentle rain. His teeth gleamed red.

He stepped towards me, and I tried to level my gun. The pain was too much. I stood like a fool, gun aimed at the sky, as the man-woman-thing advanced, revving the chainsaw in smoky bursts.

It occurred to me that, as a Party member, Ed Gein would have no trouble getting gasoline to run his chainsaw.

Almost with reverence, he hung the chainsaw up on hooks, and considered an array of butcher knives, hooks, cleavers and choppers. Bloodied blades chinked against each other as he ran his human-skin-gloved fingers over them.

"Ayup," he said, "gotta have the right tools for the job."

I was backing away. I tripped on something I figured was a hay bale and reached out to grab something. I found myself hanging onto a dangling, greasy chain.

Looking down, I saw that under a thin heaping of straw was Sheriff Truman. His face had been ripped off and put back upside-down, so his bloody nose-bone poked out through an open mouth and his eyeholes showed glints of jawbone.

Obviously, Harry had finally decided to do something.

"Ed," I said, trying to find the guts that had got those Ivans out of the crushed house, "I'm going to have to take you in."

"Ayup, Deputy Costa," he agreed.

In his hand, he held something small and shiny. It was Truman's tin star, filed to a razor-edge.

Ed just flicked the star at me, like those things the Japanese kids used to throw at the GIs in the army of occupation after the War. I felt as if I'd been punched in the eye. The shiny edge lodged in my socket like a sliver of ice. Hot blood exploded out of my face.

I didn't panic. The combat instinct took over. I levelled my pistol and took aim. I had one good eye, and could still sort of see out of the injured one. Ed was too quick, though. He hitched up his skirts and came at me. There was a blur of petticoats, a glimpse of an enormous pair of flower-patterned drawers and the gun had been kicked from my hand. He jabbed a vicious rabbit-pinch to my throat and I fell backwards.

I must have hit my head on something hard as I fell and passed out briefly, because the next thing I knew, Ed was standing over me, trying to start up his chainsaw.

"Ayup," he said to himself, "just finish this critter





and it'll be time for lunch."

That's when Lou Ford, bless his snitching little heart, showed up.

To recap, by this date, Ed Gein had committed wholesale grave-robbery, compounded by necrophilia and mutilation of corpses. On top of that, he had murdered the Sheriff and committed a felonious assault on a Deputy, to wit, me, resulting in said Deputy losing the sight of one of his eyes. That's not even considering exhuming, skinning and wearing his mother. Or unauthorized use of government-issue gasoline and countless violations of slaughterhouse hygiene regulations.

You would think that there was some possibility of him facing criminal prosecution. But Ed Gein was a Party member in Good Standing. He had just been commended for increasing slaughter production by 20% per annum for three years running, and awarded the Meritorious Order of Debs.

As soon as I got fitted with an eye-patch, I was determined to do something. This time, we couldn't let it slide.

I made a full report to the Waushara County Party Committee. The Committee was composed of Martha and Abby Brewster, two members of Augusta Gein's sewing circle; Norm Bates, Ed's twice-removed cousin; Bruno Anthony, a time-server from the state capitol who never set foot inside the county; Randall Flag, the local ideologue; and Kaspar Gutman, manager of the Party Stores. Gutman had the fattest belly in town, closely followed by the bellies of his wife and kids, because Ed kept his table well-supplied with choice cuts.

Naturally, Lou Ford failed to corroborate my story in public. Without supporting evidence, the Committee were reluctant to pursue any action against a valued servant of the state like Edward Gein.

"But he's a homicidal maniac," I protested.

"Under socialism, there is no serious mental illness," explained the ideologue. "Only in the capitalist countries do such conditions exist. Homicidal or psychotic behaviour results from injustice or from alienation in a society which treats the individual as a mere machine for the enrichment of plutocrats. It is a well-known fact that alienation from the means of production can also lead to schizophrenic tendencies. These conditions do not exist in Waushara County, or anywhere else in the USSA, Comrade Deputy."

That was the Party Line. Hannibal Lecter, the USSA's leading psychiatric theorist, had won a Frank Norris prize for his book-length argument on the subject, *It Doesn't Happen Here*.

"That's as may be, Mr Flag. But Gein killed Sheriff Truman. That has to suggest something is wrong."

"Deputy Costa, did you see Eddie actually commit this dreadful crime?" asked Martha Brewster.

I had to admit that I did not.

"Well, it seems likely to me the Sheriff was assassinated by counter-revolutionary elements operating in the area."

"Martha, you're so right," put in Abby, without dropping a stitch. She was knitting what looked like a noose, and I had an itchy sensation in my neck.

"There are counter-revolutionaries everywhere. I do believe they hide under my bed some nights. I can hear them plotting."

"What this town needs is a Drive to Rid Ourselves of Counter-Revolutionary Elements," declared Gutman. He had gravy stains on his shirt and tie. "I propose that Sheriff Costa be put in charge of the Drive. I do so like a man who can take firm action against counter-revolutionaries."

It was news to me that I was the new Sheriff. I later learned Lou Ford had turned it down. He didn't want to be in a position where he could publicly foul up.

I tried to bring up the fact that Ed Gein, Socialist Hero, was prancing about his farm dressed up in his Mama's desiccated skin, but they were all so excited about their Drive Against Counter-Revolution that they didn't listen.

"Round up all the subversives," I was told, "and we'll have the Federal Bureau of Ideology down here. No one kills our Sheriff and gets away with it."

When I got back to the office, Lou Ford had already worked up a list of subversives. It included a nine-year-old boy Abby Brewster had reported was given to loitering outside her house and whom she suspected of pelting her cat with stones. Otherwise, the best our fearless defender of state socialism could come up with were a few citizens who had been overheard complaining about shortages or voicing criticism of the Party. Oh, and Elmer, the town parasite.

"Okay, genius," I said. "Which of these killed Harry?"

Lou Ford thought about it, and suggested Elmer.

"Do you happen to remember Ed Gein dressed up in his Mama's bloody carcass fishing out my eye with Harry Truman's sharpened badge? Or him standing over me pulling at the starter on his chainsaw?"

"That's not how it looked to me, Joe," Lou Ford mumbled. "Could be you got hurt discoverin' the old Sheriff's body, and Ed was just tryin' to help out."

"Yeah, he's real helpful."

"Maybe we should put him in for a commendation."

I looked hard at Lou Ford. So far as I could tell, he was serious.

The pain in my shoulder bugged me really bad over the next few days, and the eye-injury added a terrible headache. Only thing I could do to deaden the pain was drink. On the morning of the third hangover I'd come up with a strategy.

I went and told Lou Ford that if anyone asked, he and I had spent the day in my office catching up on the paperwork. If he ever told anyone any different, I said, I'd see to it he didn't live another year. I'd written to a few old Army buddies saying that if anything happened to me, they were to waste him. It was all moonshine, of course, but it got me my alibi.

Next, me, Champion and my M1 went out to the Gein Place with a few sticks of dynamite in the saddlebags to carry out a little Counter-Revolutionary action of our own. I tethered the horse in the woods a good way off and snuck over.

I found Ed in the barn wearing his Mom and butchering a hog with his chainsaw. He never heard



the hiss of the fuse, or the clink of the top being flipped back on my lighter, or the thump of the bundle of dynamite on the blood-soaked dirt floor behind him, or the patter of my feet vamoosing to behind a nice big tree 200 yards away. And he certainly wouldn't have heard the sound of my hands covering my ears. Nope, sound didn't come into it.

Later, he told me he'd smelled the burning fuse, though. Just in time for him to get himself behind a bale of hides.

With my good eye, I watched the barn turn to a ball of flame and matchwood.

Moments later, Ed emerged in a daze. The explosion had stripped Ma of every last stitch of clothing, but like a motorcyclist's leather jacket, the old lady's tanned and toughened hide had protected Ed from the worst of the explosion. I caught myself admiring the intricate stitchwork and thinking what a shame it was that such a well-made garment was now covered in burn-marks. Then I unslung my rifle.

I cocked the gun. Little wisps of smoke rose from Ma's frizzled hair. I aimed for between the eyes, blinking inside the slightly too-large holes in the mask. I squeezed the trigger.

Nothing.

The goddamn rifle was jammed.

Desperately, I tried to clear the breech, but a round had stuck fast in there and there was no way my fingers were going to remove it. I should have known. Plenty of boys had died in the War because of dud ammunition.

Ed was coming towards me, still trying to shake the grogginess from his head.

I didn't have a sidearm, and given the nature of my last experience at the Gein Place, I figured it best to make myself scarce.

I hadn't gotten rid of him, but one of the first things you learn when you set out to work with lethal weapons, is that you don't just need a plan, you need a fall-back plan, too, and I had one.

As soon as I got back to town I got Lou Ford to run around and call a posse together. While out riding, I said, I'd heard an explosion from the Gein Place. A dozen of us drove and rode out as fast as possible.

Ed was wandering in a daze around the remains of his barn. He was still wearing his mother's hide and cradled the chainsaw in his arms like it was his baby. I made sure everyone got a good look before setting Lou to work on him with the First Aid box. Then I told the others to search the place thoroughly for any "evidence" as to who might have done this terrible deed. I wanted our townsfolk to stare Citizen Ed's calling in the face.

I also made sure we took a good look around the house. Just a regular timber house, it was. Only in the parlour, instead of cushions, there were masks made from human faces. Upholstered chairs were backed with human skin; you could still make out strips of fat on the undersides. There were lampshades and a waste-paper basket, made of human leather, too; all painstakingly sewed and tooled with pretty flower patterns.

Up in Ed's room, the four-poster bed had a human skull at each corner. Slung on a chair next to his Sunday-best pants was a belt studded with what appeared to be nipples. On the nightstand was a bowl of dried flower petals made from the top of a skull. In the wardrobe, someone found a shoebox full of strange shrivelled objects covered in salt. Nine of them. I believe the medical term is "vulvas."

Then we came to a room that had been nailed shut. Most of the guys had already taken one or two trips outside to throw up, so there was only three of us set about battering the door down. Surely nothing in there could be any worse than what we'd already seen.

It was Ma's room, left just as it was when she was alive. Just a regular old lady's room – bed, chair, closet, nice old cedar chest – all covered in a thick layer of dust.

Back outside, I called everyone together and announced that since Counter-Revolutionary elements were obviously at work in the area, it would be for the best to take Ed into "Indefinite Protective Custody" for his own safety until the miscreants were rounded up. Having had a good look around, everyone agreed. We gently helped Ed out of Ma's skin, and one or two of our number – the ones who'd maybe found bits of their relatives among Ed's trophies – took a mind to making his case for protection more convincing by kicking the shit out of him.

And that's how I got to keep Citizen Ed in the slammer for three glorious years. The posse told their families and neighbours in hushed tones about what they'd seen out there and we all happily connived in telling one another the big lie that we had to protect Ed the Socialist Hero from the great White Yank conspiracy or recidivist conspiracy or Counter-Revolutionary Plutocrat conspiracy that was out to get him. Truth is, we didn't get TV round our way until the mid-'60s, so cooking up conspiracies became one of Plainfield's favourite ways of passing the evening.

Ed was a model prisoner. He'd sit in his cell all day talking flapdoodle at anyone who'd listen. Once or twice a week, more in winter, three or four armed men would accompany him out to his place, where the barn had been re-built with Party money, and watch over him as he did the butchering. For three years, no corpses got dug up and no old ladies disappeared.

The only people who weren't happy with the arrangement were the local Party hacks. For the simple reason that their meat supplies weren't as good as they used to be. More seriously, Ed's production figures were falling, and the higher-ups wanted to know what was going on. Gutman leaned on me some to find the phantom Counter-Revolutionaries and let Ed go home, but try as I might, I just couldn't find any of the varmints anywhere. The best I could do was run Elmer the town parasite in and out of jail. Elmer didn't like this as much as he used to. Said that being in a cell next to Ed gave him the wim-wams.

Finally, in the Spring of '56, I was told that the FBI were despatching an expert to take over the Drive. I was ordered by Gutman to co-operate in every way with the big city hotshot.



"We'll get some results, my boy," he said. "Now that the professionals are on the job. We'll get some real action."

What we got was Special Agent Erskine Cooney.

I reckon Cooney was about as pleased to see me after 12 years as I was to see him. My shoulder still hurt whenever I thought of the Bulge, though it had a bit of competition from my burst eye and missing toe.

The Captain had come home from the War and landed a cushy job as one of J. Edgar Hoover's brightest and bushiest purge-meisters. He'd been compiling lists of names, cross-referencing the testimony of thousands of informers, and just plain making up stuff to fill in the gaps. He probably killed more people than Ed, and never had to leave his office before Hoover got so sick of his face that he sent him out to Wisconsin to do some honest-to-Marx field work.

He turned up in his Party car, with papers that meant he could get unlimited gas; wearing his sharp-shouldered city suit, which came with two pair of pants; and lots of stationery and folders with which to compile his lists of subversive elements. Gutman turfed me out of my office to make room for him. He spent near on an afternoon watching Lou Ford shift his goods into the office.

After that, he was so exhausted he had to go to his motel room and sleep off the work.

The next morning, at the crack of eleven, he showed up and called me and Lou Ford in for a conference, "to get the lie of the land." I was reminded of those Hollywood movies indicting British imperialism: Cooney wanted to treat me and Lou like those colonial exploiters treated native bearers...

"So, to sum up your efforts to date, you've done nothing. The subversion has continued unchecked, and no real progress has been made."

I looked at Lou Ford and decided I'd have to take pity on the Special Agent and tell him what was really going on.

"There is no subversion, comrade. Nothing bad has happened here for three years. The only problem we've got in Plainfield is Ed Gein, but we've got him under control at the moment."

Cooney looked in one of his files. "I have a string of Party commendations for Gein. He appears to me to be an asset to this community and an ideologically-sound citizen."

"Cooney, he's killed at least five people. You can come out to his place and see the evidence. Ed Gein is a mass-murderer. That's the only fact that means any damn thing."

"Director Hoover has proved mass murder does not exist in the USSA. It's a societal impossibility."

"Impossible or not, there's a farmer in the cells and I've got him marked down as connected with at least five homicides and several more grave robberies."

Cooney smiled at me. "I see your error, Costa. As ever, you allow your admirable emotions to blind you to the larger situation."

Not for the first time, I regretted omitting accidentally to roll a grenade into Erskine Cooney's foxhole when I had the chance.

He ordered me to release Ed at once.

"What has obviously happened here," says Cooney, "is that the subversives have recognized Edward Gein as a loyal servant of the Party, as one of those rare paragons who embodies entirely the ideal of American state socialism, and have orchestrated a cunning and fiendish campaign to blacken his name. I detect the involvement of insidious foreign powers, and it would take at least a dozen home-grown traitors to manufacture the mass of evidence you've stumbled over. I'm ashamed, Joe, that you've failed to see through such obvious deception, and have allowed a good man to suffer unjust accusations rather than pursuing the real traitorous elements."

Cooney, tired out by all his reasoning, decided he should go home and lie down. Meanwhile, I was to get on the job of tracing all these conspirators.

Cooney had a parting shot, though. "You know, Joe, if it weren't for the fact that I know you from the War, I'd have thought you swallowed the Gein frame-up too easily and been forced to conclude you were yourself one of the counter-revolutionary elements involved. Now, let Comrade Gein go home and let's see you get some results for once."

It occurred to me that I could compile a list consisting of the entire Party Committee for Waushara County, bulked out with a couple of now-grown-up kids who had beaten up on me in High School and a few girls who had laughed in my face when I asked them out. If I turned that list over to Cooney, he probably wouldn't do any checking before having them all rounded up and put on a train for an Alaskan rehabilitation centre.

"Ayup, Sheriff Costa, Deputy Ford," said Ed as we sent him on his way. "Mighty obliged to you for your hospitality. I'd better be getting back to Ma."

Sure, I could give Cooney a list of anyone I wanted, but the problem was that Ed Gein would continue doing what he did, and eventually we'd be back where we started, with a bunch of major atrocities and the need to pin them on someone. Eventually, I knew it'd be me.

To this day, I don't know if Cooney was stupid enough to believe what he said or just going along with policy. I can't decide which would be the worst.

A week after he hit town, and once he'd had the chance to get bored, Cooney hit on Elmer's file.

Every place has a town parasite. Physically awkward and a bit slow, always half-drunk on moonshine from some backwoods still, sitting around on porches shooting the gab, occasionally doing odd jobs badly, cadging scraps of food and tobacco. Elmer was exactly like that. It was sort of comforting to have him about the place. Not a one of us doesn't occasionally think Elmer might have the smart idea, just taking life as it comes and not being beholden to Party or person.

Cooney had Lou Ford haul Elmer out of the cell where we usually let him sleep in the Winter, march him round the back of the jailhouse, and blow his brains out with a shotgun.

"Don't clean the wall," he said. "That red patch is a stop light for subversives."

Elmer's brains were a scatter on the wall. They



spread on the snow about five feet all around the slumped corpse.

I saw other red patches. Other slumped corpses. On the snow of the Bulge. Another notch for Killer Cooney.

"We ought to leave the scum there," Cooney said. "As a warning. Of course, he'd go off."

"I believe Ed Gein has some experience in taxidermy," I said.

Cooney was on the point of taking the suggestion seriously when he worked it out. Scowling, he went home to have some more sleep.

When the Special Agent was out of sight, I took off my gloves and beat Lou Ford senseless. I broke all the knuckles of my left hand on his chin, and had to shove them into the snow to deaden the pain. I got frostbite. My fingers still don't unbend properly, and they got arthritic a few years later. I've got a permanent, useless fist. But I broke Lou Ford's jaw, and he can't inform clearly to this day.

Killing Elmer satisfied Cooney for a while. The whole town turned out for a meeting, and took turns getting up to accuse Elmer of all manner of posthumous crimes. A lot of petty stuff – some of which Elmer might even have been guilty of, who knows? – got shifted off the books.

Cooney sat on the stage beside Gutman and Flagg, modestly accepting all the fulsomely-worded tributes to his daring and cunning. I hung back and tried to keep my stomach settled. Lou Ford was still excused from duty while his jaw knit back together.

Cooney read out a message of congratulations from Director Hoover, commending the whole community for its valiant achievement in ridding itself of the last traces of poisonous subversion. Everyone applauded warmly.

Afterwards, they all tucked into a buffet of Ed's famous smoked meats.

I went outside and puked.

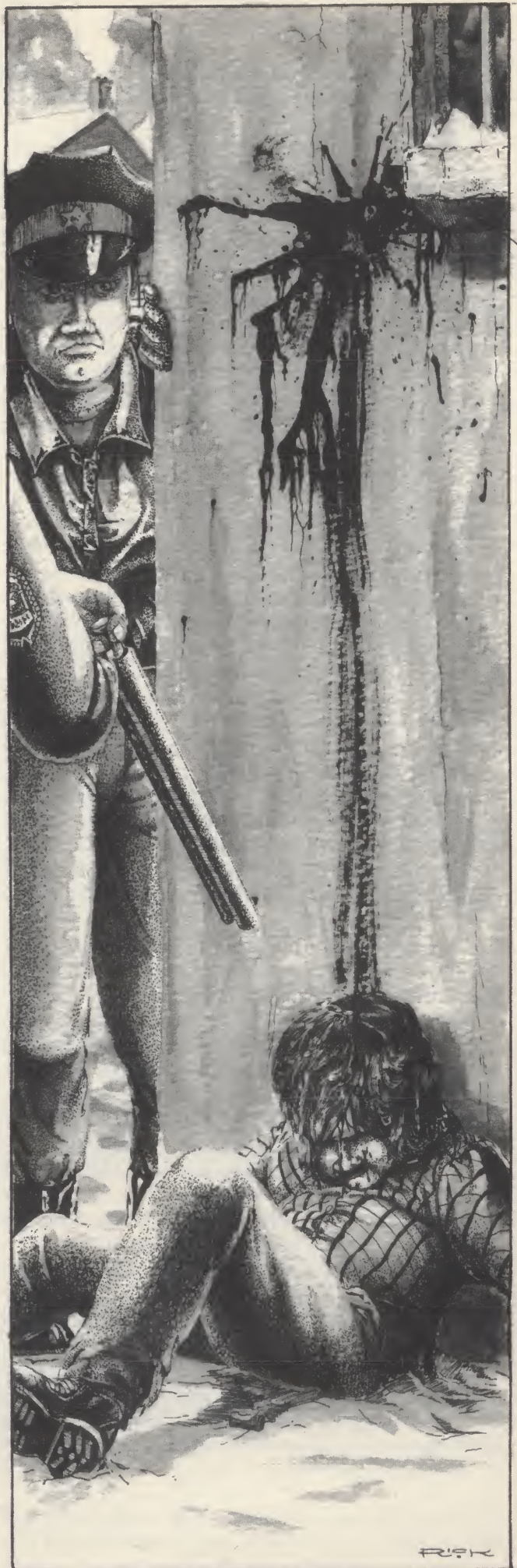
I straightened up after emptying my stomach into the snow, and saw people spilling out of the Party meeting hall.

Ed, wearing his check cap and his mama's house dress over dungarees, smiled thinly at me as he walked past. I never knew what went on inside his head. Whether he was Ed or thought he was his Mom. It's a mystery.

Even Cooney, a newcomer, could look at Ed and not see anything odd about him. It got so he was a kind of blur, looked at sideways. When he was wearing his human-skin face-mask and women's clothing, people thought there might be something a bit odd about Ed today but could never put their finger on it.

It was just the same as the way we could go without food for three days and listen to Walter Winchell praising Wisconsin for its food surpluses, and then turn round and give each other pats on the back because it was us Walter was talking about. Our bellies told us one thing, but we believed the radio.

I almost got to the point where I gave in. If everyone in the world tells you snow is red, you start to question your eyes. Maybe you've got some rare condition that makes you see red as white. Maybe the white you see





is the same thing everyone else sees as red.

The day after Cooney lit out back to Debs, D.C., the freshest grave in town was emptied. Ed was back in business.

If you weren't around back when Capone was running the show, I guess you'll find it hard to understand why the townsfolk, who all knew perfectly well what was going on, didn't just get together and march on the Gein Place with burning brands and a noose and just hang him from the tallest tree. Put simply, it was because Ed had friends in very high places. Agent Cooney was rumoured to be one of Hoover's personal bed-warmers, which is about as high as you could get in Capone's United Socialist States of America. If anything bad happened to Ed, something super-bad would happen to Plainfield. That's why we all of us wilfully ignored what he got up to.

I have another theory, too. A lot of people still believed in socialism back then. Some of the older, poorer folks would tell you how things really were better now than they had been before the Revolution. Younger people tended to think that while the regime in Debs, D.C., might be corrupt, socialism was still the best route to a perfect society. Lot of people believed — hell, I still believe — that guys like Joe Hill and Eugene V. Debs really were heroes. And the point about socialism is that it rejects superstition, meaning that when you die, that's it. So people weren't as worried about their relatives' corpses disappearing as you might think. Leastways, not worried enough to risk their own living hides by stifling Ed Gein. Fact is, if you don't believe in the Resurrection, you've got no need of your cadaver, have you?

'Course it wasn't just cadavers he was taking. He was still killing people, too. Not many, but enough.

One winter night, I woke up with an itch in my right foot. I reached down to scratch it, and touched a wet, jagged end where my foot should have been.

I realized I had been woken up by a thudding sound.

Ed Gein, grinning through his mother's shrivelled lips, stood at the end of the bed, holding a bloody cleaver in one hand and my right foot in the other.

Then the wave of pain crashed over me.

"Ayup," said Ed, "better hop to it, Sheriff Joe."

Screaming, I crawled across my cabin and jammed my ragged ankle against the stove.

By the time I'd unclenched my teeth from my tongue, my midnight visitor had departed.

I never saw my foot again. If you ask me, I think Ed ate it. Productivity went up and up. No one ever asked how come Ed slaughtered more animals than were taken out to his place.

I got used to my new tin foot a lot quicker than I'd anticipated. Only thing was, every time I saw Ed Gein, or even just thought about him, it hurt like there was a nine-inch nail being hammered through it. More phantom pain.

The disappearances of corpses and people continued through the rest of the 1950s. And a hell of a lot of animals just upped and vanished, too, or showed up dead

and mutilated. There was a lot of noise from the Gein Place, but that was what you had to expect when production records were being set. Weirdly, it was the animals people noticed: from the purges of the '30s, everyone was used to people suddenly not being there any more, leaving behind houses with kicked-in doors; however, even at the worst, Al Capone never had the FBI pounce on hog-pens or cattle ranges and hustle pigs and beeves into a four-door saloon to be taken to a cellar and tenderized with rubber hoses.

There was some muttering, especially from those who lost relatives, but that ended when Gein stood up to the local Committee and insisted that from now on he would take on his mother's old role and decide who got the products of his slaughterhouse. He came to town, in a dress and his mummified mask, and made a speech at a meeting, saying that from now on the people of Plainfield would get to live off the food they produced, not pass it on to fatcats in the cities. People got over the shock and cheered him. From then on, Ed personally ensured that every family in town got their share of his meats.

I became a vegetarian.

I think it was 1960 when I read in a magazine how some of the bigger cities were having problems because their cemeteries were full up. The solution was clean, it was efficient, it fitted the sharp new technological image that Nixon's government was trying to project. (Yes I know the history books say Goldwater was Party Chairman, First Secretary and President, but he was mad. As we now know, Nixon was working the levers).

I clanked over to Gutman's place to tell him about my idea.

"A crematorium, here in Waushara County?" he said, astonished.

"Sure," I said, "why not? It'd show them city slickers that we're not hicks and hayseeds. It'd be a big feather in Plainfield's cap, too. It'd be the first crematorium in the whole state."

"But wouldn't it be expensive? The budgets for the coming year are..."

"Got it covered," I said, handing him the cyclostyled price-list from the Acme Crematorium and Blast-Furnace Collective of Pittsburg.

Gutman took out his spectacles and examined the paper closely. He was definitely a little thinner than he'd been before Ed had decreed he'd be allocating the meat supplies. "It would mean making sacrifices on certain of our budgets."

"You can have 20 percent of mine, Comrade," I volunteered. "If we burn our dead instead of burying 'em it'll solve a lot of my problems."

He looked at me over the top of his glasses. I could almost hear the cogs creaking inside his head. Suddenly he smiled. "Yes, Comrade Sheriff, I understand. I do like a man who can make sacrifices."

The day that the first crematorium in the state of Wisconsin was opened was a gala occasion. Everyone in Plainfield was there in their best clothes, genuinely happy that the next members of their families to die would be safe from Ed Gein. Half the party brass in



the state showed up, too, partly for the free feed (naturally, Ed saw to the catering), and partly because they hoped something would foul up and they could laugh at Gutman.

Nothing did go wrong. I saw to that. I'd worked late with the engineers from Acme to see that everything was okay. The only thing missing was a corpse. At a Committee meeting we'd discussed all the possibilities. Maybe doing a trial run with a cow or hog (we'd decided that city folks might joke about us; besides, unless it was carrying bubonic plague or something, everyone'd rather eat it). We thought about asking the State Pen if they were hanging anyone, but to make our first customer a criminal didn't seem worthy somehow.

Finally, Jimmy Worden had the good grace to have a fatal heart attack three days before the Grand Opening. Jimmy used to run Plainfield's Post & Telegram Office and so he was a Party Member in Good Standing. Short of roasting Kaspar Gutman himself, Jimmy was the perfect candidate. Just to make sure that Ed didn't spoil the party, I moved Jimmy's mortal remains into the jail. We put him in a bathtub and covered him in crushed ice. Me and Jimmy's son Frank took turns at keeping watch round the clock. Frank was a good boy and I later took him on as a Deputy. I still had Lou Ford, but Frank I knew wouldn't snitch on me.

So Jimmy got sent on his way, everyone applauded when they saw the smoke coming out of the chimney and everyone agreed that the new crematorium was just dandy. In the months after, people came from all over the county, and even from further afield, to have their relatives burned, or to just look at this amazing new technological wonder. Despite the best efforts of the local Committee, the crematorium had the indecency to make a profit, all of which found its way into the pockets of Gutman and his cronies.

Everyone in Plainfield now had their loved ones cremated. I'd won this round with Ed. I knew he'd be back, though.

In the months after that, Ed's production figures didn't fall. He redoubled his efforts at livestock-rustling and his production figures actually went up. He won a Hero of Socialist Labor Citation (first class) signed by Chairman Goldwater himself. They had a big presentation in town; Ed accepted it. Since there were photographers from some out-of-town papers Gutman had persuaded him not to show up in his Ma get-up. He wore a suit and tie, and the pains in my hand, shoulder, head and missing foot became almost unbearable.

Late that evening, Ed came up to me in the street. He'd been wearing this same fixed smile all day. He had a hunting rifle with him. He unslung it as he looked into my eyes, seeing that my pain was getting in his way, saving me from him.

In a way, I guess he respected me. I guess he saw the world much the way I see it. Through a magnifying glass of pain.

Ed shot me in the chest.

I lost the use of a lung, and half my face – the half with the eye that works, of course – froze immobile. Nerve damage. After that, I couldn't breathe so easily,

especially in the cold, but some of the pain was dulled. Losing a couple of those nerves might just have kept me going.

Ed claimed he'd mistaken me in the near-dark for the counter-revolutionary who'd dynamited his barn years back. I got removed from office, for inefficiency. This time, Lou Ford had to become Sheriff. He was the hero who had shot it out with Elmer the Capitalist Mastermind in a pitched Wild West gun battle.

For a while, I considered becoming town parasite. But, as a veteran, I was entitled to work. There's no unemployment in the USSA. Just redeployed manpower.

Gutman appointed me to the post of dog-catcher and pest-control officer. With my one lung and tin foot, I could hobble after most critters with an even chance of catching up, and my monocular, non-stereoscopic vision flattened everything into a picture-book puzzle. How many animals are hiding in this forest? I couldn't tell you.

In nearly 30 years, I've never caught anything. Round here, stray dogs disappear.

And stray middle-aged-to-elderly ladies.

It came as a shock when Ed shot Frank Worden's mother and roped her to the hood of his pick-up. He hauled her out to his place and apparently played his chainsaw piata act on her, showering himself with fresh guts.

Frank tried to get Sheriff Ford to do something. Then he hanged himself. That was convenient, because Lou Ford was then able to construct convincing proof that the Wordens had been secret subversives, nestling close to the heart of the Party, sapping our precious socialist strengths. Bernice Worden was a dangerous ringleader and, without her diabolical cunning, Frank was lost and unable to live with the self-loathing and guilt.

Gutman left the bullet-hole in the wall of the Party Store, and put up a plaque commemorating Ed Gein's swift-thinking, fast-draw defence of his community and his ideals.

Erskine Cooney was appointed Assistant Director of the Federal Bureau of Ideology. He orchestrated nationwide Drives Against Counter-Revolution, modelled on the Plainfield Operation, in '64 and '72. He wrote a book about "flying cigars," claiming that those glowing things people saw in the skies in the '50s were a Russian secret weapon, and that comrades abducted by the unidentified flying objects were replaced with exact doubles skilled in subversion and sabotage. That got made into a movie and a TV series.

Sheriff Lou Ford stayed in office until 1964, though he avoided making speeches at town meetings. One night, he vanished and I figured Ed had got him. Ten years later, he came back from Alaska and it turned out Cooney had got him sent to an oil-drilling camp just in case he ever decided to tell the truth about Elmer. By then, Andy Taylor was Sheriff, but Lou Ford got his old Deputy's star back. He's hanging on until retirement, and doesn't like to talk about anything much. If it weren't for his wonky jaw, you wouldn't recognize him as the same man who disap-



peared in 1964.

Things in Plainfield changed a bit after Goldwater died. When Nixon took over in person he worked hard at buddying up to the Ivans and the Brits who were having problems of their own in Indochina. Nixon got some military production re-deployed to consumer goods, and if you worked hard and kept your nose clean you could eventually get on the waiting-list for a refrigerator, washing-machine or an automobile. Everyone got televisions because the TV could spend a lot of time telling us what a great guy Trickydick was. People still disappeared of course, plenty of 'em in the first couple of years after Roy Cohn elbowed Hoover out and took over the FBI, but they were mostly city types and almost all Party members.

Kaspar Gutman had a heart attack through being too damned fat and was forced off the Committee, but his fat son took over and is still running the county, eating as much as he can.

Ed, he was still around of course, just getting a bit older, that's all. Ed was born in 1909 and jumping people or steers in a lonely place late at night started getting a bit more than he could handle.

That's when he discovered modern agricultural methods.

When Nixon set his mind on turning the country into a consumer paradise, he directed that a lot of money and known-how be spent on scientific breeding of livestock.

I'd always figured Ed for semi-literate at best, but when I discovered him spending more and more time in the county library I was more than a little curious.

Turned out he was reading government booklets about growth-hormones and steroids and stuff like that. Next thing I know, he's taking shipment of these chemicals.

Shortly after, he started asking old ladies over to tea. He'd serve 'em tea and coffee and applejack and sandwiches and dainty little cakes he made himself. But always, one of 'em would get extra-special treatment.

Got so's it became a kind of joke around town. An elderly widow or spinster would suddenly start putting on weight and folks'd say to each other, "looks like old Mrs or Miss so-and-so ain't gonna be with us much longer." Sure enough, after six to nine months, the lady in question would just disappear.

'Course all the ladies who showed up to his little parties – and the big one he held every second Sunday in May (Socialist Motherhood Day – used to be known as Mothering Sunday before the Revolution) – knew perfectly well what was happening. A lot of women turned down his invitations flat, but a few went along because he was such a nice boy, so polite, so attentive, so happy to chat with them about their aches and pains and how their worthless kids didn't visit them often enough. I don't think any of these biddies consciously made the connection between tea at Ed's and their ultimate fate, but they still knew. I guess some of 'em were just so tired, or so lonely, or just reckoned they weren't going to be around for much longer, that they figured Ed's dishonourable intentions were a price worth paying for having a part-share in a perfect son.

My job gave me an excuse to prowls around, after Ed. When he sat in the park, making up to old ladies, or trying to seem like an old lady, I would look for strays to round up. As near as I could, I saw to it that he never hurt a fly. When he was out at his place with his power tools, I was in the woods, tracking wildcats. I kept children away from him.

Of course, people kept children away from me. I guess I look pretty frightening.

I've got more parts missing: Doc Cook misdiagnosed my stomach ulcers in 1965 and hauled out a couple of yards of large intestine, someone lopped off my right thumb while I was flat-out drunk one night after the invasion of Cuba in '68 and all my teeth fell out in the early '70s thanks to that sugar-laced party-issue orange juice.

I couldn't stop Ed altogether. In fact, I might not have done anything much. He slowed down in the late '60s. In the last 15 years, I don't reckon he killed more than five or six folks. Most of them old women not long for the world. In '75, he carried off Abby and Martha Brewster in a tender double-embrace. As a joke, when he was finished with them, he chopped off their heads and swapped them around.

Here we are in 1984 – the year in which George Orwell predicted the world would be run by tyrannical capitalists, and citizens would all be the slaves of big Russian and British corporations – and they're burying Ed with full honours. He just keeled over of natural causes, struck down while in the act of sexual congress with a week-dead pig. It would be a proper tribute to him if they cooked and ate that pig at Ed Gein's wake. I trooped past the coffin with all the others. By popular demand, he lay in the Party Hall for a few days, so folks could pay their last respects.

I made my way through crowds who were respectfully remembering the great man and took a look into the open coffin. I guess I wanted to make sure he was dead. As I stood over him, a fly crawled over one of his open eyes. I shooed it away. I'd thought there might be some satisfaction in seeing with my one good eye that the corpse-maker was a corpse himself. I was wrong.

Looking down on that thin old man with his thin satisfied smile, lying in his mother's best dress and with his favourite cap, I realized that he had escaped. Wherever he was, he was as happy as a pig in shit; and whatever his life had been like out there on the Gein Place with his power tools and dead bodies, it had been as fulfilled and delightful as any man's who had ever lived.

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**Kim Newman's** and **Eugene Byrne's** previous stories in this series about the United Socialist States of America were: "In the Air" (IZ 42), in which Buddy Holly meets Jack Kerouac in the late "Caponist" era of the 1950s; "Ten Days That Shook the World" (IZ 48), about Dashiell Hammett and many other well-known folks getting caught up in the Eugene Debs-led revolution of 1917; "Tom Joad" (IZ 65), about unrest in the 1930s USSA; and "Abdication Street" (IZ 105), about Prince Charles's wooing of a TV make-up girl in 1970s Czarist Russia. One more story to go, they reckon – and then they'll have a book.



**Graham Evans: My first question is, why do you write?**

**Kim Newman:** I can't do anything else. Back in primary school I was one of those kids who wrote stories; when told to write an essay, or a poem, I would write a story. It's probably what lots of kids do. I'd recycle films I'd seen, or television I'd watched, bits of James Bond or Doctor Who or whatever. And later, the Universal horror films and that kind of stuff. It grew from there.

I had a kind of blip in the early 1980s where I'd graduated and I was unemployed and trying to get a job, stuff like that. I never did get a job, but eventually fell into being a writer, because I was still writing. I did some work for the theatre and so on. Eventually I started selling the stuff I wrote and after a period of suffering, trial and agony, I began to earn a living from it. But it's never been a conscious decision, I never thought, "Oh, I'll leave university and become a Writer." I do not remember ever thinking that, it was something I always did, and the big hurdle for me was getting the notion that I could do this professionally. I'd always assumed I would have to do something else, but thanks to Margaret Thatcher there *was* nothing else. If I'd graduated at a happier time for the economy I'd probably be a clerk somewhere, or very unhappy in middle management. Graduate opportunities were poor then, particularly if, like me, you had an English degree. I moved to London because there was absolutely no chance of me doing anything where my parents lived, in Somerset.

**Was that "the Backwater" of your novel *The Quorum*?**

Yes. *The Quorum* is not an autobiographical novel, but all the places and the furniture of the times is drawn from my life. Everybody else at school says it was about them. In fact, the reviewer in *Interzone*, John Clute, was disturbed by the notion that it might be about people he knew. If John had taken the trouble to ask the people involved I think he would have found that they have a slightly different reading of the book than him!

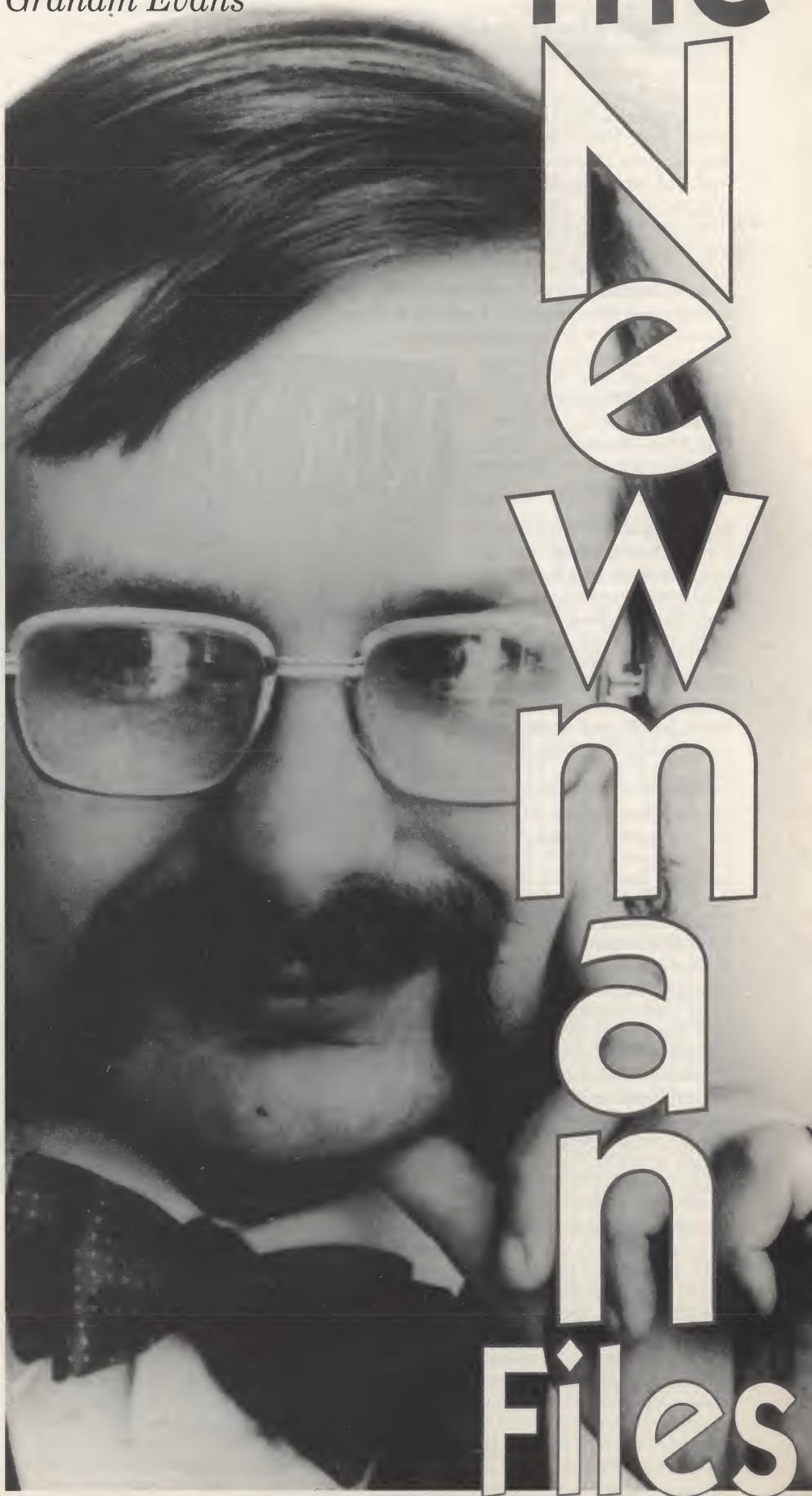
**Surely the characters were based on real people? I thought maybe Jonathan Ross and Nick Logan were loosely adapted.**

I've no idea who Nick Logan is, so...

**He's the guy who invented *The Face*.**

Oh, I know, yes. No... I was thinking slightly of Tony Parsons, who I don't know; Jonathan Ross I do know. For that character [Michael Dixon] I was thinking... in terms of his career, he's a bit like Jonathan Ross, a bit like

**Kim Newman**  
*interviewed by*  
**Graham Evans**



# The New man Files



Stephen Fry. The character's nowhere near the two. It was a difficult book to do because it's intended to *seem* like a book about real people – because it's about people who are famous, people in the media. So you have to take bits and pieces from them... The comic-book character [Mickey Yeol] isn't Neil Gaiman, but I used bits of his career because I know Neil quite well. Of course some people thought it was meant to be Neil. There are elements of what Alan Moore does in there as well, but certainly the character is nothing like Neil. One of the things that was difficult was that I was trying to convey that these people were in fact talented, that their works were worthwhile. (I wouldn't say I *entirely* love these people's work.) If I was doing it now I'd probably make him more like Irvine Welsh: I wanted someone who was basically middle-class and would often try to pretend that he is a complete drop-out and still wear very expensive leather jackets.

**Derek Leech, I suppose, is a completely made-up figure, roughly analogous to Richard Branson, Rupert Murdoch and so on?**

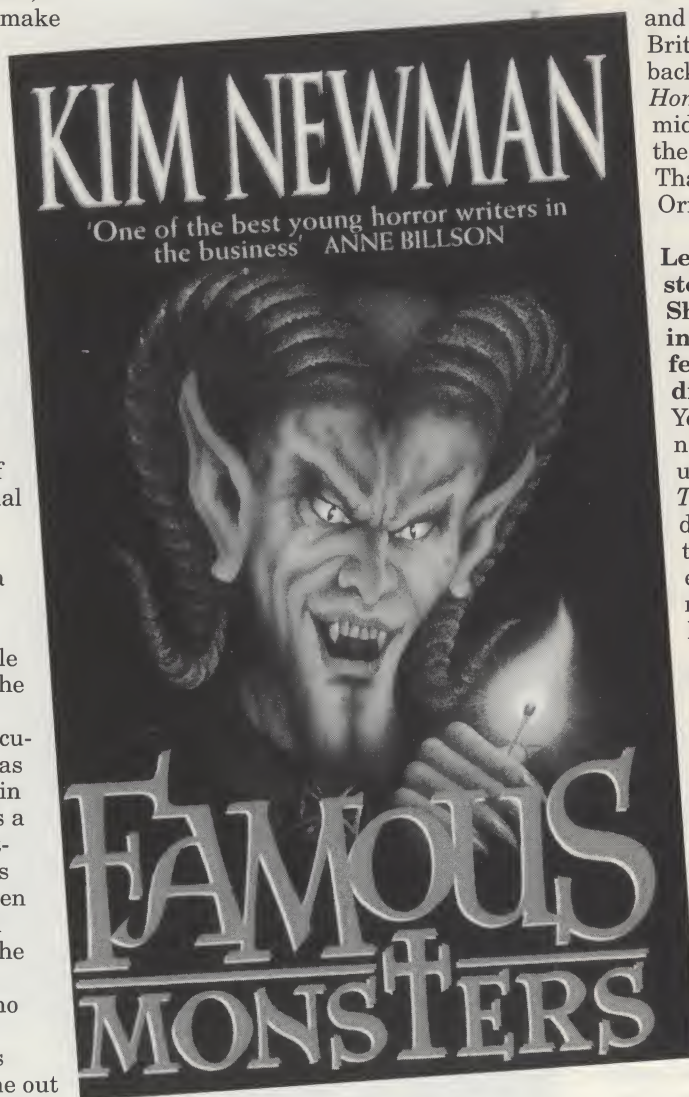
Sure, and Robert Maxwell as well. There's a little of Sylvio Berlusconi too. He doesn't actually look or act like any of those people, but in my fictional world he fills the hole left by them. And of course he's the Devil. It actually makes him a bit more interesting, I think, than Rupert Murdoch, who I find ... there's a kind of horrible banality about him and what he does. Whereas I think that Leech, although he's not particularly flamboyant, though he has done some flamboyant things in some of the stories, represents a kind of charismatic Antichrist-type figure. It's not a conscious influence, but I might have been thinking of the way Sam Neill played Damien in the last of the *Omen* films [*The Omen 3: The Final Conflict*, originally but no longer actually the last of the series], which I saw again this week because they've just come out on video. He's a much flatter character than Leech but there are bits of it that have that element. It's a very unimportant movie and doesn't really work but there are moments in it that might have started me thinking.

Although there are other elements of Derek Leech that obviously come from other things – Marlowe and Goethe; there's even quite a bit of Thomas Mann in there. I tried to mix up all the different Faust stories. When I was doing *The Quorum* I

reread the Marlowe. I didn't reread the Goethe or the Mann but they're on the shelves, I have absorbed them. Marlowe is still really zippy, there are lots of things happening and I think his ending is better as well.

**Yeah, Faust is damned.**

That's it. I think if you let him off then you start thinking, "well, yeah, that's cheating." Really, I think that if you submit to a deal then you stick with it no matter how bad it is for you. And letting Faust off, it strikes me, shows *lack* of honour. It's supposed to signify his redemption, but I don't think getting out of a contract is a redemption. Maybe that's sophistry but I did want to bring all that into it.



**Leech is British, of course – born out of the mud of the Thames, by Docklands.**

Oh, quite right, yes. I'm British, so I wanted a British devil. But I think there may be unconscious influences, some imported from the first chapter of *The Man Who Fell to Earth* – The film rather than the book may have been at the back of my mind. *The Quorum* is about British culture in the end. It's full of things that are

influenced by American stuff but I wanted him to epitomize, to grow out of, that kind of British trash culture, *The Sun* and Sky Television and the Murdoch empire. That's why I rooted him in this kind of Isle of Dogs, greyhound-racing, rag-trade culture.

**It's a very British kind decay, the East End being the dump of London...**

Yeah. I wasn't quite born there, I was born in Brixton. But certainly that section of the book is coloured a little by my childhood memories of bomb-sites and that kind of stuff. I've been involved in doing some film projects, and I've had a few meetings with people. Americans can't tell the difference between Broadwater Farm and the East End. Their idea of British poverty is still back-to-back houses and *Cathy Come Home*. Housing estates in the middle of nowhere, that's where the real locus of misery is. That's the landscape of "The Original Dr Shade."

**Leech changes a little from story to story, from "Dr Shade" to "SQPR" for instance: he's a slightly different Leech, in a slightly different world.**

Yes, that's true of all the connections, every time I've reused a character. I suppose *The Bloody Red Baron* is direct from *Anno Dracula*, though that's about the only exception, and even that's set much later. "The Organ Donors" was a kind of curtain-raiser for *The Quorum*, but even then there's a crucial omission between the two to make them both work on their own terms – being that the lead character in both, Sally, knows stuff at the end of "Organ Donors" she seems to forget by the beginning of *The Quorum*. It's simply because they are separate works. If you look at the novel, Leech doesn't actually do anything to anybody; he just relies on people to be rotten.

**And he's not a fascist, he's a capitalist.**

Quite right.

**Whereas in "The Original Dr Shade" he's a fascist who happens to be a capitalist.**

That's partly because "Dr Shade" was written in the era of Thatcherism, and I think we've moved on a bit from that to an even grimmer kind of dull notion of evil. I think what Leech



does in *The Quorum* is just show people what they can do. He doesn't actually make anybody do anything. And, particularly because you have to live with him for a while, I think that in the end, in the novel, there are stirrings of humanity. I think he quite likes people to stand up to him. I think that every time he wins, he's a little disappointed that his low opinion of people is confirmed. The fact that Sally, and in the end Neil, won't go along with it means that for him it's still worth playing the game.

**The only emotion of Leech's I can find is the moment of compassion he shows towards Sally.**

I'm not sure it's compassion, I think it's respect, because it's a relief to find one person, no matter how pathetic and ordinary... In Sally, trying not to write a "heroine," I was trying to write someone who just had a certain bedrock of moral values and *wouldn't* do it, just *wouldn't* go along with it. *The Quorum* is easy to read as a cynical book because it's about people doing terrible things. I thought quite a lot of evil was just weakness, and so I thought it important to have at least one character who just stood up to it and said, "No, I won't do this." Historically there are plenty of occasions of this, like the people who sheltered Anne Frank. So I didn't really want her to be a heroine, I just felt that she didn't have a choice. I think also it's a very British thing, it's to do with notions of duty that are a bit old-fashioned now.

**Time for influences: who are your favourite writers? You've mentioned H. G. Wells in the past.**

Wells is certainly an influence. It's hard not to be influenced by Wells. There are people like Wells, or Raymond Chandler, or Lovecraft, who are sort of genre touchstones. There are people I have enthusiasms for who are less well known. I like Richard Condon very much, Cornell Woolrich – people who haven't quite hit the Top of the Pops of genre writing.

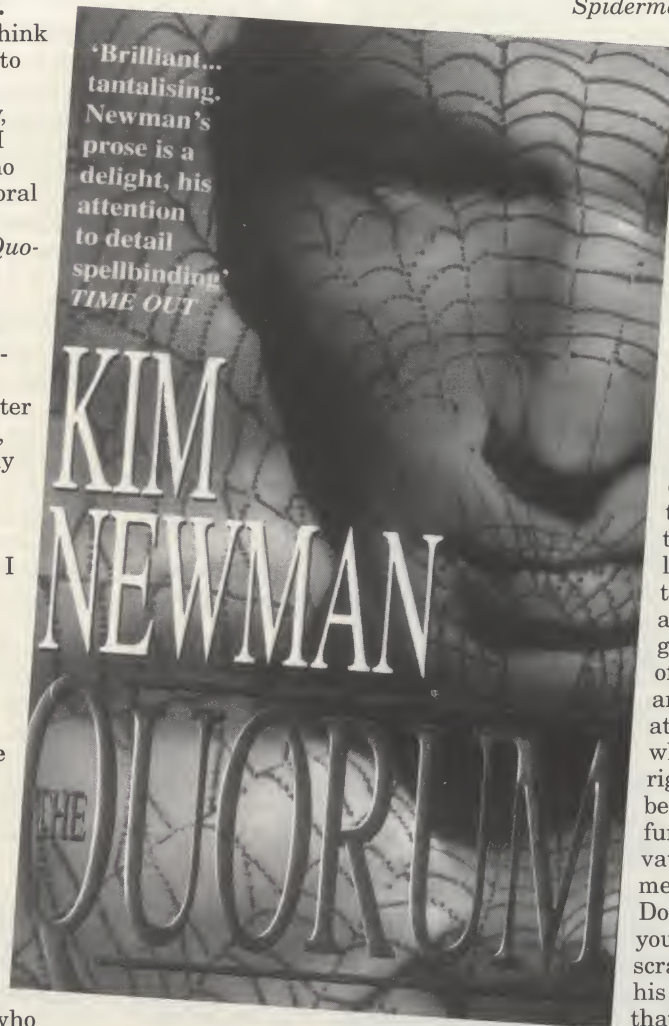
**Why do you like *The Rockford Files*?**

I think it's the best TV show of the 1970s. I'm a great admirer of that. Again, it's not a trade choice. The great thing about *The Rockford Files* is it's an inversion of Philip Marlowe. Philip Marlowe is a "man alone." The whole thing about Rockford is he likes to be alone. But he's got these really complicated relationships with his Dad, and his lawyer, and his best friend on the police ... and the strain

on his face as he drives into yet more problems! He's the bloke who would really like to go fishing, but has to make a living. There are a great many episodes I rate very highly.

**As does your character Sally Rhodes.**

Hmm. When she first appeared I think she was a bit too much like most of the female private eyes of literature, but she kind of became more individualistic the more I wrote about her, and you do find out more about her in each story. I think it's only really with "Organ Donors" that you gain any sense of her background.



**Have you got any more plans for Sally?**

I'm not sure. Probably. At the moment not, but...

**I notice that almost every story or book of yours has some sort of comics reference, often a made-up one.**

That's interesting. Like a lot of people in the business I went through a period of *really* being interested in comics, but it was between eight and eleven. I still vividly remember that moment when I decided that Marvel Comics were more interesting than DC Comics because they had better

characterization. Now I think we'd slip that round the other way. Back then – and this must be about 1969 – I remember going from reading *Superman* and *Batman*, which at that period were in a really bad phase (nothing was happening with them, the characters were just going through repetition) and then discovering *Fantastic Four* and *The X-Men* and *Doctor Strange* and all that, and being really quite taken by what now seems rather thin. And like a lot of grown-ups in this field I've looked back at some of that stuff. The thing that strikes me now, particularly if you look at, say, *Fantastic Four* or *Spiderman*, where what was innova-

tive at the time was the idea that these heroes had regular lives and they couldn't pay their bills, or they kept being evicted because they blew up houses, is that, OK, that was innovation, but I think they rubbed it in too much because in the commentary they'd always say things like, "You'd never see another comic book hero do this." I think there was a smugness about the innovation that I don't like now.

I would suspect it was mostly down to Stan Lee, that – not to take away from the fact that he did have some brilliant ideas. Interesting, I think, that both Jack Kirby and Steve Ditko, who are the great under-heralded creators of Marvel Comics, left over arguments. Both those creators left over arguments where in retrospect they sound right. I can understand because they wanted to take it further, they wanted to do innovations. Jack Kirby's big argument was he wanted Doctor Doom to take his mask off and you find out that he had a slight scratch. And that was the thing, his vanity was so monstrous, that he couldn't take it that he had a tiny disfigurement! And

Ditko left because he wanted the Green Goblin to be nobody, as opposed to someone you'd met before in the strip: that would be the whole point, this character would be a complete nonentity who was just on a random collision with Spiderman.

I lost interest in comics for a long time after that, and it's only recently that I've started looking at them again, partly because friends of mine have written them so I tend to read their stuff. I've gone back and bought very expensive reprints of the books I used to get for sixpence. I might be unusual in writing about comics but not writing comics. And also I think



that there is a vein throughout my work — it's like dealing with the shortcomings of the medium, and there are certainly things I still can't do. Writing novels is much better, there's still much more you can do with them.

### How many novels is it now?

#### Seven or eight under the pseudonym "Jack Yeovil"...

Depending on whether *Genevieve Undead* is a novel or not, which I think it is. And it's six Kim Newmans. So it's 14 novels. There are two non-fiction books, *Nightmare Movies* and *Wild West Movies*, and three books I did on top of that — *Ghastly Beyond Belief* and *Horror: 100 Best Books*, and *In Dreams*, the anthology. That's the lot, I think.

### Why do you do the Jack Yeovil stuff? Is it really — I don't mean it in a derogatory way — hack work?

Not particularly. It was originally floated to me as a way to make money, of course; but then again, writing novels is a way of making money. I don't do anything else. And, once you get past that, I couldn't have done it if I hadn't been interested in it. The thing is, I probably wouldn't have written those books on my own because they take spin-offs from other peoples' ideas and so forth. But no, I'm quite pleased with most of them. One or two of them, I think, are sloppy in ways that I wouldn't have done if I'd been working entirely 100% as me, or had more time to write them. But I think that in their own way some of the Jack Yeovils are as good as or better than some of the early books I wrote.

### Your "Pitbull Brittan" story was a Jack Yeovil wasn't it?

That was kind of a fluke, because I'd created Jack Yeovil as a name. There are several other things that appeared as Jack Yeovil and have been reprinted as me. For instance, until you mentioned it I'd forgotten that was originally credited to Jack Yeovil. Of course it was; but if I was doing it all over again I'd put my name on it.

### You were quoted somewhere years ago, I believe, as saying that your fiction was about society rather than the individual.

Maybe... It's not a hard and fast thing, I do stories about lots of things. I feel that a lot of — particularly American — horror tends to be "me first" stuff: you know, "what am I suffering?" Child abuse seems to be the kind of big cliché of that. It's like, "I was abused so I'm a monster," or whatever. It's a big issue and there's a lot to be said about it, but I think there's a rather cynical co-opting of it

into what I would regard as meretricious rubbish. But there's a lot of meretricious rubbish around in all genres.

### Shaun Hutson for example.

Yeah, I'm not a great fan of his stuff! I'm not a great fan of Jim Herbert's stuff either. There is something there, in both of those people — I wouldn't choose to read it. I have read quite a lot of it because I've reviewed quite widely in the field and I do try to keep up with what's going on. Which is why I'm not entirely sure if I'm comfortably slotted as a horror writer, but I'm not one of those people who goes around saying, "Oh, I don't write that nasty stuff. My werewolf-cheerleader novel is about relationships." But I wrote a book about vampires, and I wrote a book about horror films as well. And of course the early books — *Bad Dreams* is a horror novel, and *Jago* is a horror novel.

### But your first novel, *The Night Mayor*, definitely isn't. *The Quorum* surely isn't.

I'm not sure about that. If you look at it, *The Quorum* is one of the oldest horror stories. It's a Faust story and it's a deliberate attempt — I mean, what it is, it is a horror novel but it's not like most of the others. I deliberately tried to write a horror novel in which nobody dies... Nobody's physically hurt, but that doesn't mean there's no horror in it. I think what happens to all those people is pretty horrific.

### Yeah, but it's not blood-and-guts in the manner of Skipp and Spec-tor, or Shaun Hutson.

Oh, no. Horror's that, but horror's M. R. James and whatever as well. There are other aspects of horror. I suppose it's spiritual horror, and I don't have a problem with that.

### Why did you use Baron von Richthofen in *The Bloody Red Baron*?

He's an interesting man. I wanted to do a book about the First World War, and he was the figure who stood out, that seemed to work best as a leading ... well, not leading character, but as an emblematic character for my vampire version of World War One. He was the Bloody Red Baron, you know.

### So what do vampires mean for you?

This question keeps coming up, because obviously I've written about them so much. I have to say that they don't mean anything for me. The whole point of these two books is that vampires mean a lot of different things. It's a mythology or an image which is multivalent, there are all sorts of interpretations of vampirism.

What I've tried to do is use almost all of them, and so we keep coming back to it in the books, you see different types.

To me the problem of vampire novels is the act of vampirism, one person drinking someone else's blood. It's very repetitive, so I've tried to take different variants. I think there's a lot less of it in *The Bloody Red Baron* than there was in *Anno Dracula* because I felt I'd done that. So I keep trying to find different things to do with it, or to do with vampires. I think it shows the elasticity of the concept that there are so many ways of playing it.

### What's your idea of the significance of the vampire today, and why is everyone fascinated? Because it's useful?

I think so. I think it's not a single thing, and if you ask most authors they tell you the thing that's the ultimate significance of the vampire and how it refers to what's in their last book. I can't play that, I don't know what the rigid attraction of it is. I only know it's there, and I'm quite pleased with that because it means people bought and read the book. It's something that, like all characters or stories or legends that crop up again and again and again, it's because there are enormous numbers of ways of playing it. I think you can say the same about Hamlet or Sherlock Holmes or *The Three Musketeers* or whatever. Those are stories that mean so much to different times, to different generations, different people, and they will keep going. Once you get past a certain classicalness then there's all this stuff there that you can go and play with and reinterpret, and I suppose it gives a certain solid ground: everybody knows what they're getting, but then they get some surprises from it.

### Future plans? I understand you've done screenplays?

I've done screenplays for *The Quorum* and *Dr Shade*, which are in whatever limbo these things are in — so keep your eye on *Screen International*. The producer of *The Quorum* is very keen, and the development money's been nice. I've gone through umpteen different drafts and changed it all around. There are some things in the script, I can't remember whether I made them up or whether they were in the book first. I think that as it stands the ending of the script is slightly better than the ending of the book, but there are enormous numbers of things I had to leave out that I really like, because I can't get them all in. And lots of complicated flashbacks... So there are several things that can't quite fit into the structure of it. But I am quite pleased with it.



At the moment it reads quite well. It's playing a little long, but that'll be changed.

**Dr Shade is still set in England, I take it?**

Oh yes. That's one thing they've not wanted to change.

**Chris Fowler was saying that his novel *Spanky* is now set in Pittsburgh...**

To me that's silly, because Chris writes so well about London, so why set it in Pittsburgh? It just becomes a story then, and the story's the least important part of the book. There's never really been any serious attempt to do *The Quorum* or *Dr Shade* as American stories. I don't think they would work. But also, I am willing to compromise. Well, not compromise — I can see avenues of making these films work for an international audience. At one point I offered to go through *The Quorum* and explain all the things Americans wouldn't get, for the American edition. I would cut out the more arcane stuff, maybe replace it with references I thought would work for them. But in the end they didn't do that, probably through laziness as much as anything else. But for instance, in the script of *The Quorum* there are so many things that are absolutely fixed and have to be related to the specific class and geography and location. There are things that aren't. I wouldn't mind if Sally was played by an American. All I'd have to do if she were is rewrite her mother. That would be fine. She'd be a bit of an outsider, but that works for the story context. None of the other people could be American. Also I suspect Leech could be played by an American. I don't think that would matter. They are stories that are set in London, though, and they're stuck with that.

**Future novels: you've completed another novel already, haven't you?**

No. I've started one. It's a little like *The Quorum*. It's called *Life's Lottery*, and it's very nebulous because I haven't done that much work on it, but it's about somebody who has a lot of choices and it explores the choices that he makes. He's given a chance to see how things might work out otherwise. The unusual thing about it is

that it's written in the second person and the narrator is Derek Leech. So it's Derek Leech talking to someone. I'm not sure if that will even be explicit, but that's how I'm writing it. The voice is Derek Leech telling you — although "you" as a character — what might happen. But I haven't got very far with it. All this may change. But certainly Leech will be a part of it. And the lead character is somebody who would have been at school with the Quorum. It's the same school, but not a character you've met before. But you meet some of the people again. I've only really written the bits that deal with his primary and secondary school. I'm up to Rag Day 1976, or something, the school disco sequence. But there's another 25 years worth of stuff.

moving, the first day at school sequence, and all that kind of stuff. It brought back stuff that they had suppressed completely. I have to say, I ran it past Eugene Byrne, who I collaborate with quite often...

**Who you were at school with?**

Yes, that's right. He remembered one of the things I'd forgotten. He's a lot more bitter about it than I am. He wrote this amazing rant about the disciplinary system at our old grammar school, and how prefects were identified by tassels on their caps and that gave them the right to do terrible, terrible things to people. All that's in *The Quorum* and there'll be a lot more of that this time round. But that's not all there is to the book, there's other stuff going on — universal stuff I hope.

**The only other person who writes like that is Neil Gaiman.**

Yeah, although he went to a public school. I think that kind of limits his experience sometimes.

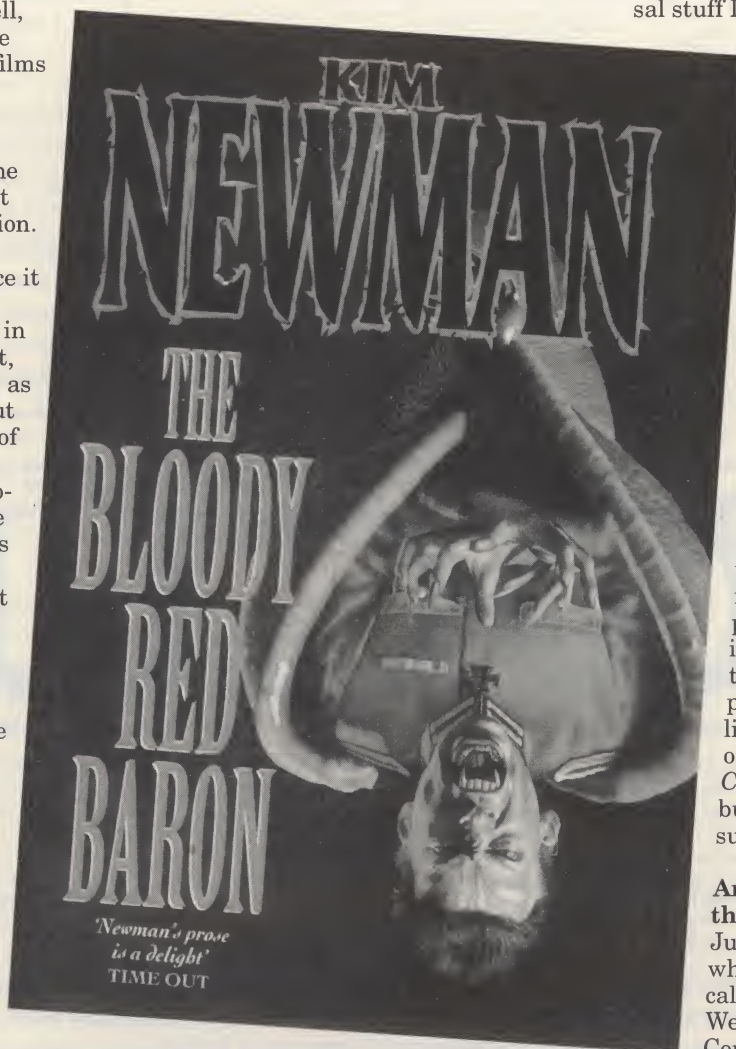
**What happens in the end of this new novel?**

I don't know, I haven't written it yet. The whole thing about this novel is it gives you the choices, so it kind of has a multiplicity of endings, but only one beginning. It will fan out, an enormous number of things will happen. I hope it all ties up. But I'm in the middle of it at the moment, so I can't promise. I can't even promise it'll be called *Life's Lottery*; that's the working title — the publishers liked it, I quite like it, but we'll see. The other title I had for it was *Choose Your Own Adventure*, but that may end up being a subtitle.

**Any more short stories in the works?**

Just done one for *New Worlds*, whenever that comes out. It's called "Great Western." It's a Western story set in the West Country, but I don't want to give away too much... Eugene

Byrne and I are working on a couple more collaborative things in the "USSA" series we've been doing for *Interzone*. There are two more of those currently in the works [one being in the present issue of *Interzone* — Ed.], and we hope to do a collection next year that'll have a further story that will tie the whole thing up. They're getting longer and more complicated, and more work.



**The schooldays bits in *The Quorum* rang horribly true for me...**

A lot of people say that, a lot of people who broadly fall within my age range, because nobody else was writing about it. That's why all that furniture is in there. In some way I wanted to redeem the incurable naffness of it all... Horrible as some of these characters are, I did try... I reconciled myself with some aspects of my past in writing it. And there were things that people told me they found quite



### When's your next short-story collection?

I don't have enough stuff yet. Since *Famous Monsters*, which is the last one, I've not written that much. Last year I wrote one very tiny short story. Since then I've written two more "Where the Bodies Are Buried" stories which are quite substantial, one of which was in *Dark Terrors*, which is already out. The other is in next year's *Dark Terrors*. I'm currently collaborating with Paul McAuley on a story as well. The thing about collaborations is that they go on for ever – you post the discs back and forth. Eventually it'll get finished.

### Where did this tiny little story appear?

There are two tiny little stories. One was in *Interzone*, "Slow News Day," and the other one was called "The Germans Won," which is in Nick Royle's anthology of football stories.

### Have you given up on near-future predictions now, since you have such rotten luck with them?

Not particularly, no. The last "Where the Bodies Are Buried" story, which is "Where the Bodies Are Buried 2020," that is a near-future story. It kind of sticks onto the beginning of the world seen in *The Night Mayor* and some of my earlier stories. It shows the beginnings of that form of entertainment.

But also it's about Europe, it's what the EC might be like in 20 years time. It also involves some of the characters and plot threads from the "Dark Future" books as well. Again it's kind of pulling together or re-using of old material.

You're right, you can lose out. "SQPR" was proved hideously wrong in the short term. It was published the week before the general election in 1992, and of course we all assumed that the Labour Party was going to win and I thought it was important to start writing about that, and then of course they lost. That said, if you reread it now – in fact even since *Famous Monsters* it's actually much more accurate now – all the stuff about the Prime Minister in the story is very like Tony Blair. It's a woman, but they are almost exactly the same, so in the long term I may have been right.

### She's in other stories as well. Have you got her whole career mapped out?

No, that's why all this stuff never adds up, you just go back and see who's available to put in. She's in *The Quorum* briefly, but that's before she became Prime Minister, and she's in "Where the Bodies Are Buried 2020" as well, which takes place late in her premiership. I don't have any coherent future history that I am sticking with, and all the stories contradict each other.

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# The Literary FRUITCAKE

Don Webb

I bought the fruitcake from Mary Denning. Mary had opened a shop on Haight selling Beat Generation memorabilia. Like most of Mary's enterprises, it was open for a few months and then disappeared as quickly – and like most of her shops, I had the feeling that there was more going on than simple commerce – but as Mary remarked to me when she sold me the item, "There's a mystery in money."

The fruitcake was in a shoebox in the Kerouac section. It was marked 250 bucks, which seemed a bit much for a frankly dusty piece of overhard pastry (even if Kerouac had owned it). I said to Mary, "So what's the story here? Kerouac's mom bake this or what? Genuine French-Canadian fruitcake?"

"Ginsberg gave it to him. Burroughs gave it to Ginsberg. In fact there's quite a history on that little number."

She passed me a two-page pamphlet printed on pseudo-parchment.

## The History of the Literary Fruitcake

*You are what you eat.*

The custom of giving fruitcakes was introduced to the English-speaking world by Queen Victoria, and this wonderful example of the liquor-preserved candied-fruit cake was actually among the first ever given. Like the *stollens* of Victoria's native Germany, such cakes often had more than one owner; and few cakes in the history of cakedom have had as distinguished a pedigree as this piece of *realia*. (Author's note: *realia* is a term from library science for a non-book piece of literary remains.)

In 1843 Queen Victoria attended the first dramatic reading of Charles Dickens's *A Christmas Carol*. Her Majesty was so impressed at the young writer's ghostly Yule tale, she placed him on the royal fruitcake list. This cake was dutifully delivered to Dickens's home on Christmas Eve 1843. The original presentation card and box have since disintegrated. The card bearing the inscription "To Boz Love Vicky" was added by Alice B. Toklas when the cake was in

the possession of Gertrude Stein.

Mr Dickens treasured the cake as a conversation piece for a number of years. When he began his affair with the actress Ellen Ternan, the cake became a much talked-about item in the theatre circuit. The young Bram Stoker purloined the cake during the publication party of *Our Mutual Friend* in 1865. He later confessed his cake-napping to Dickens and offered to return it, but Dickens said that if the cake had such meaning for him he could keep it. At that time Stoker was an unpaid drama critic for the *Dublin Mail*.

For years Stoker would show off the cake, indeed after Dickens's death swore that he would eat it up and then finish *Edwin Drood*. However, Stoker's theatrical guests tired of the tale and the cake went into storage. At the publication of *Dracula* in 1897, Stoker mentioned the tale to Arthur Machen, who asked to see the cake.

Stoker not only displayed the cake but presented the Welshman with it. Machen was overjoyed at first. Here was a suitable offering to give to the Spirit of Inspiration at a Golden Dawn ceremony that he intended to attend. The Spirit of Inspiration was personified by a fellow ghost-tale writer, Algernon Blackwood. Blackwood took the cake home and put it away in a closet.

The century turned. The cake aged, and Algernon Blackwood, still seeking mystical experience, went to Gurdjieff's retreat at Fontainebleau. There he met Margaret Anderson, publisher of Gertrude Stein and James Joyce. He presented her with the cake – in the hopes that she would pass it along to Stein. Stein, who had a low opinion of Dickens, was not thrilled with the cake – but it is rumoured that Alice B. Toklas did come up with her famous recipe for hashish brownies shortly after the cake's arrival.

Stein wrote a poem about the cake:

*Four ghosts in a Carol*

*And five writers on one cake*

*And Carol is a carol is a carol.*



*Outed a ghostly cake.*

Ernest Hemingway applauded the verse when he first heard it (at a drinking party Stein hosted for Picasso), and Gertrude rewarded him the cake. Hemingway recorded the entire incident in *A Movable Feast* (including his suspicions of Alice B. Toklas creating the "Love Vicky" card while under the influence of hashish). Hemingway had for a long time wished to meet the by-then blind James Joyce. Deciding that such an interesting cake would be a suitable gift, Hemingway went to Joyce's home in Paris. He presented the cake to Joyce's secretary Samuel Beckett, who told Hemingway that Mr Joyce no longer received visitors. Joyce did later send Hemingway a thank-you card.

At Joyce's death the fruitcake passed on to Samuel Beckett, who in the lean years prior to *Godot* often thought of eating it. However, money, fame, and his general dislike of sweets combined to keep the cake intact.

In 1959 William S. Burroughs came to Paris to work out details for publishing *Naked Lunch*. He attempted to pay a visit to his writerly hero, Samuel Beckett. The reclusive Beckett allowed Burroughs in his home for only half an hour – then ordered him to leave. Burroughs wanting a souvenir of the visit took what he believed to be a brick from the bottom of Beckett's hall closet.

When he returned to Tangier he discovered that it was a fruitcake (and borrowing Paul Bowles copy of *A Movable Feast*, read Hemingway's account of same). He decided that it would make a great gift to one of the occasional visiting writers from the States.

In 1962 Allen Ginsberg visited William S. Burroughs and briefed him on the *Naked Lunch* obscenity trial. During the visit Burroughs wrapped the fruitcake in a shoebox and wrote the words: REALITY SANDWICH FROM UNCLE BILL'S DINER on the outside and gave it to Ginsberg – with instructions not to open till Hanukkah.

At the beginning of Hanukkah 1963 Jack Kerouac was in New York for an interview with William Buckley. Kerouac's drunken and slovenly appearance coupled with his remarks about the then-emerging hippie culture pretty much ended his career and popularity.

As Kerouac prepared to leave New York, Ginsberg presented him with the fruitcake, which he had opened the night before. Kerouac took it home.

Toward the end of his life, Kerouac regretted the remarks on the hippie culture, and had the fruitcake shipped to Richard Farina. Kerouac had read *Been Down So Long It Looks Like Up To Me* in an advanced proof copy, and realized that beatitude could live on in hippie writing. Farina received the cake days before his tragic death, and, like most of Farina's literary remains, the fruitcake passed to Thomas Pynchon. Pynchon traded the fruitcake to Mary Denning in exchange for her expert knowledge on pre-WWII German organic chemistry texts. You can now own this wonderful piece of literary history now entering its 150th year.

Of course I had to have it. To have my name associated with the great stream of literary becoming was

too wonderful to pass up. I never doubted the story of the cake for I have never known Mary Denning to lie. In fact her honesty is often what makes her scary and powerful.

I wrote a cheque and took the fruitcake to my hotel, then on to my Austin home. Slowly I began to wonder what spiritual energies the cake might contain. Perhaps the ghosts of *A Christmas Carol*, the eroticism of *Dracula*, the ultramundane horror of "The Great God Pan," the chill of "The Willows," the mind-freeing syntax of *How to Write*, the understanding of machismo in *The Sun Also Rises*, the architectonic sweep of *Ulysses*, the alienage of *Malone Dies*, well you get the idea by now. If there was even a chance that some of those vibrations lay in Victoria's gift – my writing would be transformed and improved by the word of these masters. And if not, at least the literary legend that could come from my eating the cake. I would earn my place as a footnote in the *Oxford Book of Literary Anecdotes*.

And in some sense hadn't I already eaten the fruitcake, before I even saw it? Had not each of these writers nourished me, prepared me for my task?

I told a few close friends that I would eat the fruitcake on Christmas Eve of 1993. I fasted all day. In the evening I attended a Christmas party, but when my lovely wife and I returned home, we discovered our house had been looted.

TV, VCR, PC and even items of value not easily acronymed had been taken. We called the police and consoled each other with love.

Then I found the fruitcake was gone.

No doubt some snack – or more likely bitten into and tossed away as hopelessly stale.

I looked around the neighbourhood for awhile, but saw no cake fragments.

Then I saw the graffiti on the back of the 7-11. It, as you know, was the beginning of the greatest novel in the English language. I called to the store owner. She read along with me and wept at the beauty.

Over the next few months, the graffiti began to cover wall after wall – as the driven thief released the intensity of his soul. Soon people from far away came to Austin. We never sought out the writer, for we feared our presence might interfere with his process, but we grew fiercely proud of the words that covered our walls.

Soon all of Austin was obscured by the words of perfection.

We, who dwell in the holy shrines, will preserve this treasure unto the ends of time.

*for Allen Varney and Mary Denning*

**Don Webb**, needless to say, is a literary fruitcake who lives in Austin, Texas. The above story, previously unpublished, appears as the first item in his recent small-press collection *A Spell for the Fulfillment of Desire* (Black Ice Books, c/o FC2, Campus Box 4241, Illinois State University, Normal, IL 61790-4241, USA). Don's last stories to appear in *Interzone* were "The Surgeons" (#97), "The Flower Man" (#99) and "Lonniemania" (#105).



# CATHEDRAL

## Nº 3

Ben Jeapes

### Bilquis

Bilquis Lakhani picked her way through the remains of Coventry, which had probably been destroyed in the name of the same god that she had been brought up to believe in. It was hot in her suit and there were parts of herself that she longed to scratch, but comparing her environment *inside* with the toxic filth *outside*, she felt she had the better of it.

She climbed to the top of a pile of rubble and looked about her. A lot of the city was still standing; she had imagined it would be a flattened wasteland like she had seen in pictures of Hiroshima or Nagasaki, but most of the buildings here were made of steel and concrete. The city wasn't so much flattened as slumped. A few days ago, it had been a normal, upright city on a bright and sunny day, and thousands of normal men and women and children had been going about their daily business. And then those buildings had been thumped by an immense force that broke their strength and spoiled their clean lines, and those that survived the initial blast were hit by the air rushing back in again.

The older buildings, the brick-and-mortar buildings, had crumbled and what Bilquis stood on now was a heap of broken red bricks. She had asked a friend, born locally, how one found one's way around Coventry, and the bright reply had been, "why, you just look out for the spire of the cathedral – oh."

Oh indeed, Bilquis thought. No spire any more. Still, she thought she had her bearings and she set off in a new direction.

### David

The wind that gusted through the remains of the roof was made visible by the swirls of poisonous ash that it carried into the cavern of the wrecked cathedral. After the black and bloated cloud that had hung over the city for so long, perhaps the ubiquitous ash would be the next most potent reminder of the calamity.

The ash irritated the man who knelt down in the nave. It swirled down upon him and on the area of floor that he had cleared. It obscured the drawings he had made there, and though David Stapleton himself knew them by heart, he was concerned that they should look their best for the others who would come to see them.

There was death in the ash but that didn't bother him; he was dying anyway. The city was contaminated and every breath that the man took, every second more that he lived, only helped his diseased cells to die a bit more. He could feel the rot inside him spreading through his organs. When he coughed which was often blood and maybe even bits of lung came out, and he feared that if he coughed too hard his body would fall apart.

He fingered his charcoal lump and studied the sketches again. In his mind he clothed them with three-dimensional reality. He had experimented with so many designs, just like the original architects of the ruin around him. Looking up at the south end of the cathedral (the elaborate clear glass window that had once occupied it entirely now lay in a white pile of a million shattered pieces) he could see the dark shell of the old cathedral, the current cathedral's predecessor. The building he was now in had been built deliberately on a slightly lower level than the original, to indicate humility and reverence for the old ruin. Now the new cathedral had gone the way of the old; how should cathedral number three be built? He turned back to his drawings.

It would be a pyramid, he had decided. Pyra-mid. Pyre. Fire. Coventry died by fire. Again.

### Bilquis

This had to be it. Bilquis stood at the bottom of a flight of steps. At the top on her left was the dark stone of a medieval cathedral, and on the right a far more modern, barn-like building, showing yellow stone beneath the burn marks and just about intact. She walked up the steps to it and came to a stone set into the wall at waist height, which according to the inscription was the foundation stone of Coventry cathedral laid by HM Queen Elizabeth II. At any other time the idea would have amused her.

This whole end of the building was open to the elements; she deduced it had once been a large window. She peered into the depths of the cathedral and hesitated. Her local mosque in London was a converted church, but she had never actually been inside a functioning Christian house of worship before.

Bilquis looked about her. Functioning? As she was



in pursuit of a story it wasn't as if she was going over to the other side so her soul should be safe, and the souls of generations of dead Lakhanis back in Bangladesh would not grieve.

She stepped quickly into the cathedral while the glow of self-persuasion lasted.

## David

Footsteps crunched in the broken glass. His visitors?

His visitor. A solitary figure was picking its way past the crumpled porch and through the pile of glass into the cathedral. The newcomer's breath passed through the mask's filter with an asthmatic wheeze. He would be invisible where he knelt in the gloom of the cathedral's interior, so the Dean of Coventry cathedral walked into the light to meet his visitor.

"Bishop Stapleton?" asked the visitor, voice distorted but clearly female. It had been impossible to tell through the bulky protection suit and the mask that hid the face.

He smiled. "Not Bishop, just Dean, and you can call me David," he said.

"David. Ah, right. David."

As the two stared at each other, David felt a sudden disgust for the visitor's garb. How dare this outsider wander into the heart of the ruined city, breathing only safe, filtered air, isolating herself from his city's hurt and pain with the protective layers of the suit? It was a stupid feeling and it lasted only a second until reason took over, so he ignored it.

"And you are...?" he prompted.

"Bilquis. Bilquis Lakhani... um... David." The accent was pure south London.

And what did she think of him? An old, stooped, balding man, still in his tattered cassock, with bleeding gums and deathly white skin. "And you are a journalist?"

"That's right. I'm freelance."

"Freelance, oh." He knew he sounded disappointed.

"Hoping for the *Times*, hey?" He couldn't tell if the distorted voice was hurt or making a joke.

"Oh! Oh, dear, no. Sorry. I just thought... never mind." Suddenly he chuckled, a rattling noise which turned into another of his terrible coughs. His vision faded and when it cleared again he was being sat down in a seat. He put a hand to his mouth and wiped away the trickle of blood that he knew would be there.

"Now, what on earth was that about?" demanded Bilquis Lakhani.

"Oh, I just thought, two Brits, chatting about this and that, not at ease because we hadn't yet got around to the weather, and we haven't been introduced properly..." He tailed off, then remembered her remark about the *Times*. "I'm sorry I sounded ... well, well done for getting here! No, I just hoped that a few more would make it. I have something to say, you see, and the more coverage I get..." The words dried up. Suddenly, his great plan was seeming futile.

"The whole press corps got your message," Bilquis said, "but none of the big papers could slip away from the press camp unnoticed. The authorities know who they are. But me? I'm just small fry."

"I see, I see... where is this press camp?"

"Birmingham. Safely up-wind."

"Birmingham? My dear girl, you must have walked all day!"

"They want to keep us well out of the way. But no, I hitched a lift on an army landrover. I, um, borrowed a pass."

"Well... well done," David said again. A sense of hospitality, a legacy of civilization, made him feel guilty. "I have some provisions, food and drink, stored away and I would offer them to you, but you'd have to..." He gestured at the mask.

"I understand," she said.

"Oh, good, good..." They sat staring at each other again.

"Do you stay here, now, in the cathedral?" Bilquis asked. "You don't go anywhere?"

"No, no," David said. "The captain of a sinking ship, you understand. My house was flattened, I sleep in my old office."

"No family?"

"Three grown-up children," he said quietly. "My wife was shopping when..."

"Ah. And are there others? Do you ever see anyone else?"

"A few, a few. I try to provide what comfort I can to any survivors who come in. A few did come, at first. Now they're all in the hospital camps, to die with dignity. I advised them to go. I sent the cathedral staff away as well. I won't drag anyone down with me."

"But you won't leave yourself?" Bilquis asked.

"No." Again they stared at each other, unsure what to say next. "Tell me about the outside," he said. "I haven't been able to find a working radio since the blast."

"The real world?" The goggles still looked at him blankly but he thought he detected sympathy behind them. "Well, um, let's see. Yes. The mayors of Nagasaki and Hiroshima have sent their condolences. The question now is, do we retaliate? We don't know who did it but everyone's pretty sure it wasn't a foreign power, so the chances are we won't."

David shut his eyes. That had been his chiefest fear, his greatest worry. The mushroom cloud that had hung over Coventry, hanging over a hundred other cities. "Thank God," he murmured. "Thank God."

Bilquis shifted uncomfortably. "You said it," she said. "No, they think it was some terrorist group which somehow got hold of weapons-grade plutonium. It wasn't a proper nuclear bomb, you see, they say. Just a nuclear device. And it wasn't fired by a missile or dropped, it was planted."

Now David couldn't believe what he was hearing. "A device? They can split hairs like that? What the hell difference does it make? Don't they see that a city is dead? That thousands and thousands of people are dead, burnt, mutilated, poisoned, that... that..."

"Hey, hey, hey!" Bilquis held up her hands. "I agree, David! But it's important. If it were a bomb then the chances are it would have been another country... get my meaning?"

David took a deep breath. "I get your meaning," he said. "But do they have any idea who...?"

His visitor took a breath and he thought he detected reluctance. "Various groups have claimed responsi-



bility and... the most likely contenders seem to be the Crimson Jihad." The last sentence came out in a matter-of-fact rush.

"Muslims," said David.

"Hey! Do you have a problem with Muslims?" Bilquis demanded, and David could tell even through the mask that she wasn't joking.

"Oh, I'm sorry! I'm sorry. No, of course I don't. Some of my best —" He stopped. Bilquis had her hands on her hips and was looking at him, waiting. "That's even more patronising, isn't it?" he said. "To say, 'some of my best friends are... Muslims, Jews, homosexuals, women, all of the above, other, fill in where applicable.' I'm sorry, Bilquis."

From her stance, Bilquis seemed to be relaxing, slowly. "For what it's worth," she said, "every Islamic group and organization in this country, and several abroad, including several Islamic governments, have condemned the act. And some of my best friends are Christian, but I don't hold it against them." He *thought* she might be smiling behind the mask, until she added: "despite the gangs of Christians who've been fire-bombing mosques ever since this happened."

He bit his tongue on his immediate reaction: to deny that they were Christian. He had learnt the hard way that pat explanations tended not to wash and might not be true anyway. "Do you think I'm that sort of Christian?" he said.

"Do you think I'm the sort of Muslim who nukes cities?"

"No. Could we rewind and start again?"

The mask's unblinking gaze held him for a moment. "I think it would be best. You were asking about the outside."

"Um, yes, I was. How are people taking all this? Apart from, I'm sorry, fire-bombing mosques?" he said.

"How do you think? Shock, outrage, why didn't the government do something. Seems it tried. They got a warning that a Midlands city would be destroyed and everyone thought it would be Birmingham, so they pumped security agents into the place, each with a surreptitious Geiger counter—"

"— and they missed out on Coventry completely," David said. "I wonder if it was deliberate or just fluke?"

"What was?"

"Look," David said, springing to his feet. He staggered and clutched his chest, and at once Bilquis was by his side holding him up again. He brushed her off.

"Look," he repeated. "This is what I called you for." He pointed out of the south end of the building. "What do you see?"

Bilquis looked. "The old cathedral."

"Correct! Now, what do you know of Coventry's history?"

"I know it was bombed before."

"It certainly was. November 1940. The Luftwaffe flattened it. The cathedral was burned out, only the walls and the spire still standing, and the rest of the city was just rubble. They got to us long before we got to Dresden.

"And then, after the war, Coventry rose again. They built a new cathedral, this one, full of symbolism about love and forgiveness. German volunteers helped

rebuild it. This cathedral stood as proof that the devil can never win. God's love is greater. Through Christ they could forgive. They could embrace the Germans as brothers and sisters in —"

"Supposing you don't believe in God?" His wife had called it sermon mode, and Bilquis interrupted him just as he was slipping into it. "All this becomes meaningless."

"Yes, yes, yes, but don't you see it?" David said, irritated. "This cathedral, a sign of hope. A mighty monument to love. Love! Love, love, love. We must never hate. Never. The Nazis hated, but through love their evil works were defeated."

"The invasion of Normandy and the Eastern Front helped, but that's one way of looking at it," Bilquis conceded. "And...?"

"Come here, come here." David beckoned and scuttled further into the cathedral, feeling like some shy little boy showing off a secret.

### Bilquis

*You're just not for real*, Bilquis thought, but she followed him. David Stapleton stopped at the edge of the clear area where he had been working. "Look," he said with pride, pointing at some wavery charcoal designs on the floor. "The future."

Bilquis looked and tried to make sense of them. "Um..."

"I'll show you." Again he pointed out at the old cathedral. "The old." He waved a hand around him. "The new. This one was designed, you know, in a special way. As I said, full of symbolism. Now Coventry needs a new one again. Here." He pointed at the sketches on the floor and described his grand scheme for the third cathedral, the greatest of the three.

At first he had pictured a giant dome over the hulks of both cathedrals. The time for humility was past; this new one would not be lower than the other two. It would stand out above them, above the whole devastated city, a proud statement to the glory of God.

Eventually he had realized that the floor plan of a building which already contained two cathedrals would be too ridiculous. He had abandoned that idea reluctantly for the final plan, the pyramid that now lay sketched out in the nave. The third cathedral would stand at the north end of the second. Future visitors to the complex would go from the first cathedral, to the second, and finally to the mighty third.

"A far greater monument even than this one, Bilquis. I can see the three cathedrals now, in a row. A new, rebuilt, Coventry around them, dominated by this pyramid at the end. The cross at its peak, towering over the whole city..."

"David," Bilquis said, "Coventry is radioactive and it won't be rebuilt for years, if at all. Not until it's clean and safe to live in."

"I know!" David snapped. "Listen, Bilquis, I know I'm a deluded old man who will die soon." He straightened up as best he could. "But I am the Dean of this cathedral. I believe Coventry has a message for the world and I must see that someone takes this message to it."

"Is that my job?" she said.



"Yes." His assurance fled him just as quickly as it had come. "If you could," he added, almost as a plea.

"How?"

"Tell the world about this," he said, pointing at the floor. "Don't let them forget. I know I'll be long dead, but you can write. I know how the press can take one small incident and blow it out of all proportion."

"Thank you."

David ignored the comment, or didn't hear it. "You can write a sob story. 'My talk with last Dean of Coventry.' 'Tragic Dean's hope for the future.' Aren't the politicians always saying the church should give a more definite lead? Here's a definite statement for them. Tell the world, make them listen, make them know. Tell them that I forgive whoever did this. Tell them that Our Lord forgives."

"That's very good of him," she said. "What gives him the right?"

David looked puzzled. "What?"

"David, you can forgive the bombers if you want, but you don't have the right to do that on behalf of the people of Coventry. That's their problem. And unless we missed the headline of the millennium, Jesus wasn't in Coventry at the time, so how can he forgive either?"

David grimaced. "I won't go into the theology of your last statement. To answer your first point, I don't claim to forgive on behalf of Coventry, just myself, but I hope my example will move Coventry to do likewise and they must have a new cathedral to tell them this. Tell them, Bilquis. Even if you don't believe it, tell them, I beg you."

"No," said Bilquis. It took a moment for David to realize what she had said. He staggered back as though she had hit him. "What did you say?" he whispered.

"No," Bilquis said again. "There's no story. I'm sorry, David."

"What do you mean, there's no story? This isn't a story?"

"No, it isn't. Coventry's been here before, David, you said it yourself. All those living saints who built this cathedral and forgave the Germans – that was when the story was. And you're a very saintly man yourself, but 'Dean of cathedral forgives bombers' is no longer a headline. I'm sorry. I'm really am."

David slumped down onto a chair and looked at the markings on the floor. Bilquis wondered if he was finally seeing them as they really were. Pathetic, childish, a futile gesture in the face of Coventry's tragedy. Soon David Stapleton would die and just one good fall of rain through the holes in the roof would wash the charcoal markings away for ever.

"That's not it," he said.

"What's not it?" said Bilquis.

David looked up at her. "It's not this lack of a story. You've got another reason. Go on, say it." He gave a bitter laugh. "I've been through worse."

"If you insist," Bilquis pulled up another chair and sat down across it, with the chair-back facing him. "You're enjoying this."

"How can you say that?"

"Because you are. This cathedral –" She waved a hand at the floor "– you've always wanted to build, and now you've got your chance. And I think you've

always wanted something really big and nasty to happen to you so that you could have a really good forgiveness binge, and now it's happened. Deep down, I don't think you do forgive them, but you've convinced yourself that you do. So what do you do? Naturally, you build a pyramid. That was irony, by the way."

David Stapleton sat in silence for several minutes, looking blankly at the floor, and Bilquis began to wonder if she should just leave. She glanced at the indicator on her wrist that showed her suit's working life; she still had half an hour or so, allowing an hour on top of that to walk back to a checkpoint...

Then David stood slowly and his gaze drilled through Bilquis' visor. "I see," he said. He bent down and picked up a kneeler which he tossed to her. She flinched, but it was only a gentle pitch and she managed to catch it. "Give me a hand, will you?" he said and, with a kneeler of his own, he began methodically to erase the charcoal pyramid on the floor. A quarter of the way through he stopped and looked at her. "I said, will you give me a hand?"

So together, they rubbed the floor clean.

*If you're trying to make me feel guilty, Bilquis thought, it ain't gonna work.*

"Now, we'll try again," said David. "Crimson Jihad, you say?"

Bilquis hadn't said Crimson Jihad any time in the last ten minutes and it took her a moment to work out what he was on about. "Um, yes, that's right," she said.

David didn't answer for a moment. He had his charcoal lump in his hand and he was down on the floor again, sketching. Bilquis frowned. What he was drawing looked familiar but she couldn't place it.

"I'll try and make it a traditional shape," he said. "Easier to identify."

That was when Bilquis saw it. "Good grief," she murmured. He sketched away for another ten minutes and even then the design wasn't as complete as the former pyramid, but it was obvious what he was getting at. He stood up, wincing, and Bilquis helped him.

"Coventry's new cathedral," he said. "Now, is there a story?"

"There could be," she said. "There could be." She couldn't take her eyes off the drawings.

"I mean, the shape of the building isn't important, is it?" he said.

"Anyone can still worship in it. This is based on the Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem, with embellishments."

"Of course, of course..." Her time in the suit was running out and soon she would have to leave, but for the time being she was careful to drink in every detail the carvings, the dome, the minarets of the mosque that was sketched out on the cathedral floor.

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**Ben Jeapes's** previous stories here were "Memoirs of a Publisher" (IZ 43), "Crush" (IZ 68), "Getting Rid of Teddy" (IZ 76), "The Data Class" (IZ 80), "Giant Killer" (IZ 89) and "The Robson Strain" (IZ 97). He lives near Oxford, and his debut novel is on its way – real soon now.



Just before the NASA splash about Martian nanobacteria, there were subtle examples of what we litcrit types call foreshadowing. On a Radio 5 phone-in, astronomer Dr Paul Murdin explained Mars in terms comprehensible to post-privatization Britain: "Look, Mars is something like South Yorkshire, right? There are signs that there used to be water there once..." And Brian Aldiss played straight man in the *Telegraph*: "As yet, at least, we have no evidence that life, never mind intelligent life, exists anywhere else in the Galaxy." Within days came the boggling claim that a Antarctic meteor seemingly from Mars had been found to harbour microscopic copies of *Ansi-ble*, containing fossilized jokes more than 16 million years old. Steve Baxter, in the true spirit of science, subjected the claims to the impartial light of self-promotion: "From the point of view of those cute Mars bugs, *Blue Mars* must look an awful lot like *Independence Day*. Of course it's good PR for my own Mars novel *Voyage*, due out in November. I don't even need a rewrite. I just hope the felt-tip pen I used to draw those fossils on the rock doesn't wash off, oh what a giveaway." As for that man Aldiss...

## VAST AND COOL AND UNSYMPATHETIC

**Brian Aldiss** appears to have had a nasty moment on the road to Damascus: "I'm an honorary member of Allied Religio-Scientific Engineers (best known under its acronym), who work with NASA scientists. They will publish a report on their findings next week. As Christians understand, God created all the planets and sent his Son to each one of them, in a sort of stellar Bully Graham crusade. In every case, the Son assumed the physical appearance of the dominant life form. Close examination of meteorite ALH 84001 by ARSE scientists indicates that the single-celled organism just revealed – expelled from Mars as a more violent form of crucifixion – actually is the Martian Christ. Negotiation is now taking place with NASA officials to ensure that the sacred fossil will be housed in Jerusalem, in the Church of the Holy Sepulchre. If Jesus did not arrive on Earth earlier, as claimed, he is certainly here now! Praise be to God in the Highest."

**Pat Cadigan**, quelling my last column's expressed fears, assures the world that she *does too* still have limitless supplies of gall. "I'm just not keeping it in a bladder any more. This means there will be even less delay in my producing whatever gall may be needed for any and all occasions... You dog."

**Ellen Datlow** of *Omni* leapt aboard the sickness bandwagon by announc-

ing her hospitalization for a week (at \$900 per day) with pneumonia, subsequently re-diagnosed as TB ("completely curable... it's just so... archaic"), followed by a shock re-diagnosis as only pneumonia after all. What a lot of excitement unwell Americans get for their money!

**Jo Fletcher** notes that new Gollancz man Humphrey Price has only half of the late Richard Evans's job: "He's editorial director of Vista, I remain in charge of all the sf, fantasy and horror list."

**Bruce Sterling** clarified his idea of fun: "No, I will not be at Worldcon. I will be in the desert with ten thousand hippies setting fire to a giant wicker man."

**E. C. Tubb's** 32nd "Dumarest" book – the one his US publisher DAW Books didn't consider publishable, and which has appeared only in French (*La Retour*, France 1992) – is due out from US small press Gryphon Books as *The Return*, in 1997.

## INFINITELY IMPROBABLE

**Hugo Awards.** These were presented at the Worldcon, L.A. Con III, on 1 September 1996.... Novel: *The Diamond Age*, Neal Stephenson. Novella: "The Death of Captain Future," Allen Steele (*Asimov's*). Nov-elette: "Think Like a Dinosaur," James Patrick Kelly (*Asimov's*). Short: "The Lincoln Train," Maureen F. McHugh (*F&SF*). Non-Fiction: *Science Fiction: The Illustrated Encyclopedia*, John Clute. Dramatic Presentation: *The Coming of Shadows (Babylon 5)*. Pro Editor: Gardner Dozois. Pro Artist: Bob Eggleton. Original Art: *Dinotopia: The World Beneath*, James Gurney. Semi-Prozine: *Locus*. Fanzine: *Ansi-ble*. Fan Writer: Dave Langford. Fan Artist: William Rotsler. John W. Campbell Award: David Feintuch. How pleasing that the great John Clute should have an unshared award at last.

**Retro Hugos.** An attempt at belated honours for 1945 work.... Novel: *The Mule*, Isaac Asimov – later part of *Foundation and Empire*. Novella: *Animal Farm*, George Orwell. Nov-elette: "First Contact," Murray Leinster. Short: "Uncommon Sense," Hal Clement. Dramatic Presentation: *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (M-G-M). Pro Editor: John W. Campbell, Jr. Pro Artist: Virgil Finlay. Fanzine: *Voice of the Imagi-Nation*, ed Forrest J Ackerman. Fan Writer: Forrest J Ackerman. Fan Artist: William Rotsler.

**Starlog Nobbled.** The suit of 11 artists against *Starlog* magazine for "breach of copyright and unfair competition in respect of a set of 42 'trading cards' published in 1993 without

## ANSIBLE LINK



DAVID LANGFORD

their permission" was settled on 16 July, with *Starlog* boss Norm Jacobs agreeing to pay \$30,000 to the artists (Ron Miller, Don Dizon, David A. Hardy, Den Ellis, Chesley Bonestell, Don Davis, Ludek Pesek, Rick Sternback, Adolf Schaller, Joe Bergeron, and David Egge). After attorneys' fees the artists will get some \$400 per card... "about 700% of what Norm tried to pay them when the cards first came to light," observes our court reporter David Hardy.

**Publishers & Sinners.** *John Grant* reports: "Virgin are starting three new series lines, called Virgin Worlds (essentially space opera), Virgin Something Else (erotic crime) and Virgin I Really Have Forgotten What The Hell This One Was About."

### Section Title Explained.

*Dr Thorndyke*: "It seems infinitely improbable that we shall learn anything from it ..." (R. Austin Freeman, "The Contents of a Mare's Nest," 192?.)

**Savoy Books** lost their July/August High Court appeal for the right to a jury trial of whether the heaps of their comics seized by Manchester police in 1991 (including *Lord Horror* and *Meng & Ecker*) are obscene. The appeal depended on an assurance by law officers to Parliament that "serious publishers of literature and art" would get a jury trial if they wanted one. Savoy were apparently deemed non-serious; Crown Prosecution Service person Stuart Ashman let slip in court that he had not wished to have the case heard before a jury because he would then have stood little chance of winning. British Justice – Best in the World.

**Thog's Masterclass.** "When they finished eating, they would lie silently under the blankets until sleep shuffled over the roofs to the leaded skylight and threw itself down on them, sprawling like a wanton over their faces." (Felicity Savage, *Humility Garden*)



## MUTANT POPCORN



NICK LOWE

*Disch:* I'm writing a book about what everyone wants most.

*Moorcock:* Really? Is it about elephants?

*Disch:* Elephants? No, it's about becoming more intelligent.

*Moorcock:* Oh. What I've always wanted most is to be an elephant.

That's the problem. As Charles Platt originally pointed out in recording this famous exchange, you just can't count on your audience wanting to be smart. And in Hollywood, where the Barnum principle has reigned for generations and intelligence of any kind has traditionally been viewed

with suspicion and alarm, you can smell the unease about adjusting to an age where hackers earn better than lawyers, Jeff Goldblum characters are blockbuster heroes, and it's quietly grown groovy to be geeky. On the one hand, smart people are quite cool and even sexy, so long as they operate in the private sector or, better still, as maverick individuals. On the other, anyone who could be tarred an "intellectual" is distrusted and resented: nobody loves a smarty-trousers, and especially not an occupant of a tenured academic post (unless, of course, he spends the whole movie on research leave with a hat and a whip).

So the industry's preferred solution has tended to be to construct narratives that contain the threat: by phenomenalizing intellect as a freakish gift of God or science to otherwise "ordinary" figures (rather than, for example, something available to anyone with access to a modestly-effective education system); by outsidersidering the gifted individual as an emotional or societal misfit, deserving of our pity rather than our grudge; and by arranging a suitably poignant doom that terminates the hero's reign of brain so all us stupids can sleep easier in our beds. It's no accident that, of the three canonical novelistic evocations of enhanced intelligence (Anderson's *Brain Wave*, Keyes' *Flowers for Algernon* and Disch's *Camp Concentration*), the one picked up by Hollywood was the one where the benefit is limited to a solitary individual, and the effect is temporary and tragic. The idea that just *anyone*, or even everyone, could learn to think is perceived as vaguely threatening, and in Hollywood films on the theme it's

important that the world is made safe by the final removal of the savant from the scene – if not by reversal of his brainification (*Charly*) then by sending him manic and psycho and having to blow him to smithereens (*Lawnmower Man*).

Into this minefield tiptoes *Phenomenon*, an interesting if self-destructing film about a guy who finds that becoming more intelligent means winding up as the elephant man. It's significant here that the hero's intellectual self-improvement, which is what the film's actually about, has to be firmly supernormalized by being accompanied by some otherwise-pointless psychokinetic abilities. These sit so awkwardly within the movie's laudable overall rationalism – both the lights in the sky and the enhanced intelligence are allowed a materialistic, if medically skimpy, explanation – that they seem to be born solely of a concern to pack the story in a fabulizing bubblewrap of images from religion and fantasy, in case anyone gets the idea it could happen for real.

Like *Charly*, it's built from the outset as an actor movie. Any performer with an eye on the prize remembers the history of Cliff Robertson's route to the 1968 Oscar: buying up the rights to *Flowers for Algernon* himself, leveraging the project to the screen via his own production company, and carrying off the statuette for his own performance in his own star vehicle. And it's with this in mind that *Phenomenon*'s "George Miller" (obviously, not *the*) is a role transparently sculpted for an ambitious A-list actor looking to climb the Power 100. It ticks all the boxes for recognized Academy-shortlist trademarks: 150%-hyperacting in portrayal of mental abnormality/terminal disability (here, for good measure, both); adult-oriented "drama" subject with aspirations to visionhood and uplift, anchored in hearty sentimentalization of ideal America. Even better, its narrative is one that leading persons can instantly connect to: a tale of a good-looking, modest man deserving of universal love, singled out by a celestial spotlight to see the dazzle of stardom, cruelly isolated from the world that adores him by a fickle public's resentment of overachievement and insensitivity to the private person behind the dazzle, and finally vindicated by leaving behind him a body of work that will immortalize his memory in the hearts and lives of all and make his very birthday an annual holiday. Obviously we can't know if this was what pulled in John Travolta, who makes as good a job as could be wished of understating the overacting, but the death and resurrection of his own career gives a con-

Below: *Phenomenon*: John Travolta (left) as George Malley, and Robert Duvall as Doc





veniently close fit to the narrative curve; and while I suspect the alleged echoes of Scientological myth "Unlock the Full Potential of Your Mind!", as the fliers for *Dianetics* have it) are a bit of a red herring, it's obviously a piquant role for the Church's star apostle.

But an attractive feature of *Phenomenon* is that it's a flexible enough text to invite a wider range of readings. On the most obvious level, it's an observant if wishful reflection on selective higher education and the awkward estrangement of the local kid who goes off to college and comes back with a different head. But it's also about attitudes to success, and the mixture of envy and resentment that achieving people who fulfil their promise feel subject to from those they grew up with who didn't. And there's a lot about the frustrations and anxieties of creative people (such as ooh, for example, Hollywood screenwriters) who feel constantly underappreciated, misunderstood and haunted by their own mortality in the face of endless unfinished projects and others that the system seems dedicated to prevent the world from ever seeing. To all these and everyone else with a narcissistic sense of their own worth, the soothing message of *Phenomenon* is sooner or later they'll be as loved and valued as they feel they ought to be, and all the better if it's sufficiently posthumous for the survivors to wish they'd done more about it while they could.

Unfortunately, *Phenomenon*'s plot traverses a Charly Gordon life-cycle of its own: starting off folksy and amiable if a touch challenged up top, rapidly becoming a lot more intelligent and interesting, and then losing it totally in a tragic descent into hopeless imbecility. The first act, where Travolta sees the light on his birthday ("37," he soliloquizes, and then again slowly in response to audience disbelief, "yep, 37"), is refreshingly brisk, tight, and interesting; and the first part of the second, where the changes escalate and the rather dreary romance plot develops, ticks nicely along with lively observation of the symptoms of genius (which actually look a lot like the symptoms of cocaine abuse, but I suppose that's Hollywood). Some slippage occurs when the (hiss boo) state gets involved, but even the security forces are helpless in the face of George's downhome brand of politics ("I shouldn't be listening to codes forbidden to the Saudis — these guys are our allies!"), and the Feds send him home after putting him through nothing worse than one of those amusing scenes with a Brent Spiner cameo. It's only at this point that the script gives the abrupt impression that the



Above: *Phenomenon*: Forest Whitaker (left) as Nat Pope, John Travolta (centre) as George Malley, and Robert Duvall as Doc

credited writer was trussed in tape and dropped in a vat of syrup, as the pacing slows to treacle and the quality of plot and dialogue plummets completely off the scale. Here, for an instance, is the bluejean mahatma's final message to the world in full: "You know, if we were to put this apple down it would be spoiled and gone in a few days. But if we were to take a bite out of it it would become part of us and we could take it with us forever." Earnest pause: "Everything is on its way to somewhere. Everything." Or how about: "Every woman has her chair, something she puts herself into." (They had to cast Robert Duvall just to get away with that one.)

For in the end, *Phenomenon* can't resist trying to give those who don't share the Scarecrow's wish what they really want instead. What men want, for example, is a good woman, an absorbing hobby and a lot of scenes in bars. What women want is wise, caring, extremely good-looking men who wear their world-beating genius modestly, retain a sense of grooming and some elementary interpersonal skills, and deploy their brilliance in the service of chick-pic plot needs like matchmaking, courtship, and parental bonding, with none of the self-obsession and gittishness that middle-aged male recipients of a more traditional tertiary education are all too prone to display. And what movie audiences want is romance, sentiment and reassurance that narrow horizons and humble aspirations are the fastest way to heaven, and that true wisdom lies not in science and reason but in cracker-barrel koans

about the human spirit.

To this end, the whole thing is set in an earthly paradise of Touchstoneville, CA 95658: a face-to-face rural community deep in the heart of feelgood country. As established in the opening titles, with their sunrise shots of weathered timber architecture and kittens wrangled in farm machinery under sentimental strings, this is one of those Postman Pat lands where bad things don't happen and nobody feels hostility: a timeless, crimeless land of traditional handicrafts like auto repair, where dogs don't kill rabbits, neighbours live out of sight in the next valley, and big government is something that happens to other people. It's a middle-aged, middle-brow, middle-of-the-road, middle-American world where it's impossible to do anything without a gruesome AOR ballad on the soundtrack. (The Sheryl Crow, Aaron Neville, and Bryan Ferry numbers are particularly cover-your-ears. It would be nice to believe that Robbie Robertson, who pocketed a wad to select this stuff, was merely demonstrating a ruthlessly-pragmatic sense of target audience). And the turning point of the movie comes when, at the very height of his intellectual apotheosis, George goes so far as to start to grow a beard, and then in a moving redemption is pulled back from the brink by a woman's love and a soft-rock haircut scene. But alas, it all comes too late: from here on down, the road is lined with man-sized Scot-ties, and leads back, as it must, to a bale of spring flowers offloaded on Algernon's grave.

Nick Lowe



# WORSE THAN THE DISEASE

*Brian Stableford*

**T**he trouble with living and loving in the Age of Recreational Disease is that you have to be very careful what company you keep. Some people have very strange ways of enjoying themselves, and there are some *truly* sick individuals around whose idea of enjoying themselves is to stop others from doing likewise.

I like to think that I'm as liberal as the next man. I don't mind the usual kinds of diseases – the ones that come with the Official Government Health Warning. Anything you can buy across the counter in Boots and take by mouth, with a sweet to take the taste away, is perfectly okay by me. I've tried a few of the popular ones and I have to say that I think they're over-rated by the fashion gurus, but as long as they stay where they're put and aren't contagious I don't have any objection at all to people using them – even kids. We're living in the 21st century and we have to take an enlightened view of such things.

Where I draw the line, though – and where the line really has to be drawn for everybody, in my opinion – is the kind of disease that you can pass on to other people. What people do to themselves is entirely up to them, but when they start inflicting it on others they're definitely out of order. I'm not talking about the far-out crazies of the DLF – just ordinary people who are plain downright *irresponsible*.

The things that can be spread by coughs and sneezes are bad enough, but the worst betrayal of trust by far is when a person deliberately passes on a sexually-transmitted disease. I know that some people get an extra kick out of sex if they do it while they're infectious, but that seems to me to be the kind of kick that's simply *perverse*. Some people say that it doesn't really matter, given that everything is curable nowadays, but it's not as simple as that. It's a mistake to think that all cures return you to the condition you were in before. Sometimes they don't.

Sometimes they can't.

I met this woman a little while ago. Her name was Sarah. She was slim and sweet and eminently desirable – and she was carrying a really heavy-duty mutant STD. When I say carrying, I mean *carrying*. She was an authentic Typhoid Mary, suffering only the slightest of symptoms and offering no immunological response to the virus. It was the kind of thing

that's only supposed to last a fortnight even if it's left untreated, but Sarah had played host to it for years. That's one of the problems with recreational diseases, you see – just like real diseases, they don't take everybody the same way. What some people can live with in peaceful equilibrium reduces others to physical and mental wreckage.

I'd like to think that Sarah simply didn't understand that what was harmless to her wasn't harmless to others, but it wouldn't be true. I'm pretty sure that she knew *exactly* what she was doing, and got a thrill out of it. Maybe she thought it was funny that something that didn't hurt her at all could have such a profound effect on others.

I thought she really liked me! Even at the end, when I found out I'd been infected, she acted as if she'd done me a favour, for affection's sake.

"People like you don't realize how narrow and tawdry their lives are," she said. "I'm just broadening your existential horizons a little. If you don't like it, all you have to do is take the shots."

To Sarah, it was as simple as that – but not to me.

What the virus did was to screw up the pituitary and the hypothalamus in such a way as to alter the neurochemical balance of my emotions. Maybe I reacted more extremely than others whose existential horizons she'd broadened, but I doubt it. I took the shots as soon as I figured out what was happening, but I still had to suffer the symptoms until the antiviruses could bring my system back to normal.

Pleasure went right out the window, reduced from a perfectly healthy day-by-day thrill to absolute zero. On its own, that wouldn't have been particularly problematic – I could have used common-or-garden uppers to treat the symptom while the antiviruses got to work on the cause – but that was only part of it. The decrease in pleasure was countered by a dramatic increase in grief and envy. That wasn't so easy to treat with palliatives, partly because it wasn't just a matter of degree.

I started feeling sorrowful about the weirdest things. I felt sad about the gradual diminishing of the soap on the side of the wash-basin. The brokenness of the white line down the middle of the road brought me to the brink of tears. I actually broke down sobbing when the sun was eclipsed by a fluffy white cloud. I had to leave the TV on all day and all night



because I couldn't bear to switch it off. Cooking became an absolute nightmare in spite of the fact that I took care to avoid anything remotely *fresh*.

The world seemed so full of tragedy that I thought my heart would break.

The envy was even worse. I began to envy oak trees their mistletoe, and cats the loving bite of their fleas. The sight of a photocopier sucking sheets of paper out of the feeder would drive me to paroxysms of jealousy. Every time I heard a phone ring I was transfixed by the angry knowledge that I couldn't sing as sweetly. Everything I needed and didn't have seemed to be in the possession of unworthy animals, stupid plants and inanimate objects, all of which were utterly and insultingly oblivious of their awesome good fortune.

It seemed as if I were spending half my waking moments in tears and the rest grinding my teeth in jealous rage. The only breaks I had from abject misery were intervals of fervent envy, and the only breaks I had from wrathful contemplation of the precious possessions of absurd objects were the hours when I couldn't stem the flood of my deepest sympathies for the piteous plights of the very same entities.

There aren't any efficient palliatives available for those sorts of symptoms. Downers only intensified my sorrow and uppers only sharpened my envy. Unless I was prepared to spend an entire week under general anaesthesia I simply had to hang on while the anti-viruses got to grips with the bogey in every infected cell.

Had I know then what I know now I'd have opted for the general anaesthesia but I was stubbornly determined not to fold up under the pressure.

"How bad can it get?" I said to the doctor, in a blithely rhetorical fashion. "It's not as if it were chronic asthma or gas gangrene, is it?"

Unfortunately, the virus was just as stubborn as I was. I had three relapses before my immune system, aided and abetted by the best antiviruses money could buy, finally came through for me. At first the doctor assured me that the antiviruses would clear up the trouble inside 48 hours, but two days became four, then eight. By the time I was finally free of it I was beginning to think that I might as well have let it run its course.

I lost 18 pounds and all my dignity.

The last time I spoke to Sarah she told me that she hadn't meant to hurt me at all, and that all the stuff about broadening my existential horizons had been bullshit. All she'd *really* wanted, she said, was to make sure I wouldn't ever forget her. She succeeded. I might have made a real mess of her face if I hadn't had a sneaking suspicion that she'd rejigged her nervous system so that she could enjoy that kind of thing.

I'm over the STD now, of course. Physically, I'm back to normal. There are no *organic* after-effects at all. Any residual problems I have are purely psychological – but the trouble is, you see, that you can't *forget* something like that, and you can't entirely unlearn the experience.

Once you've been reduced to the depths of anguish by the slow melting of a bar of soap, and once you've been plunged into a hell of jealousy by the fact that a

cat has fleas, it's not easy to re-orchestrate your responses in the ordinary way.

My mother died last week, and I can't seem to feel a damn thing – it means no more to me than the fact that the white line down the middle of the road has gaps in it or the fact that clouds occasionally pass across the face of the sun.

You might think that that would be the worst of it, but you'd be wrong. I didn't suppose I'd ever miss the ability to be envious, but when nothing that anyone else has – money, possessions, status, beauty, intelligence – seems any more important than the paper consumed by a photocopier or the plaintive song of a telephone it becomes well nigh impossible to want anything at all.

I can feel pleasure again now, but I can't desire what I don't have and I can't grieve for anything I lose. Maybe it'll all come back, in time, but it'll take a lot longer than a fortnight.

If you want to know what Hell is like, I can tell you. It's what I've had to come back to now that I've been cured.

If you ever run into Sarah don't bother to give her my love – and be very careful how you dispose of your own. We may have domesticated disease, but we aren't yet the masters of ease.

---

**Brian Stableford** lives in Reading and writes rather a lot.



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# THE CONFLAGRATION OF THE GRYFFE

SYLVIA M. SIDDALL



There was a new fashion in Nuovo Loundes for glass. Wind-chimes of spun glass tinkled under the eaves of the houses, windows that had always been frosted plastic now shone in the sun, clear as the clearest water or most limpid air. Old superstitions were laid to rest, glass was no longer unlucky – youngsters took to carrying knives made of hardened glass and the fashion-conscious wore glass ornaments knotted in their hair or crystal studs in their ears. It seemed as if I could not turn my head without catching sight of sparkles or shining expanses of the stuff. Maybe society had reached a point of stagnation in which the adventurous, unable to risk their lives in war, took to courting disaster by flouting old laws made for their own protection. Or it could simply be the time of glass come around again in a vast cycle too long to be comprehended by ephemeral man.

I had been sent away to college for three years, a

maturing process deemed essential for the heir to one of the great houses of Nuovo Loundes. I was exceedingly homesick for the first few months, then against all my expectations I enjoyed myself hugely and returned home with a couple of new minor vices and the conviction that I was now very sophisticated. My father seemed glad in his usual disinterested fashion, he indulged me in my demands for my own personal flyabout and the money to clear my gambling debts. I was lying on my bed in my old room, very pleased with myself, contemplating my future and recent past with equal satisfaction, when Timon knocked at the door and came in.

“Welcome home, big brother,” he remarked, while I must have gaped and looked like the most credulous adolescent in the world. I barely recognized him. Three years ago I had said goodbye to a gang of younger siblings and cousins, a polymorphous mass of scabbed knees and gapped teeth, accompanied by high-pitched squeals and yelps. Now here was the oldest of them, my half-brother Timon, a black-haired prince with level grey eyes and an unconscious grace





Illustrations by Russel Morgan

that had been obscured in the child I had left behind. While I had grown up, Timon had metamorphosed.

"Well, well," I said, aggravated at being caught unprepared, "If it isn't a little brother. Hello Timon, long time no see. How's the shell collection coming along?"

"Very well, thank you," he replied graciously. "Thanks for sending me the cowries."

I tried to appear equally gracious and waved a hand. "No trouble."

We looked at each other and something broke. We both burst out laughing.

"It's been too quiet around here without you, Sven!"

"Well I'm back now to cause trouble. What's the gossip?"

Timon sat down on the end of the bed and pulled up his knees, hugging them to his chest. He looked like some kind of sprite, too languid and supple to be real.

"Father's got a new mistress and she's a bitch, married Mimian off to some off-world tycoon and she jilted him and went and got pregnant by his business rival, would you believe..."

I sighed happily and settled down to listen, glad to

be home, and watched the splintered light reflect from the cut-glass stud in his ear.



"I've something I want to show you," Timon remarked. I glanced aside at him, too busy trying to pilot my brand new flyabout through the air-streams to humour him.

"Secrets?"

"Yes, secrets."

I shrugged, pretending an adult indifference to our old games. "There's nothing new in Nuovo. Fornicating boring little tin-pot empire."

"That way."

"East? There's sod all out east except recycling plants and derelict industrial sites. Grim and depressing."

Timon gave me a sly, sideways smile. "That's what you think, big brother. Drive."

"Been exploring, have we?"

"Across the river."

"Whose flyabout did you steal?" Timon was not the kind to indulge in petty crimes, I thought I knew him



that well.

"I hiked."

"With Randa?"

"On my own."

"That was bloody stupid. What about the dogbears and scavvies?"

Timon shrugged. "Are you suggesting I'm incompetent?"

If nothing else, Timon was competent. He touched the pocket of his jacket, the small but unmistakable shape of a personal defender.

"Shit, have you got a licence for that thing?"

"Of course." He tilted his chin to stare out of the window. "I brought back a twelve-striper skin."

"A twelve-striper? I didn't know dogbears grew that big!"

Fast, savage and unpredictable, the wild dogbears of Nuovo are famed for their pelts, which grow another stripe every spring as they moult. Historically, the hunt for the dogbear was the test of manhood, a bloody initiation rite into adult status in which the big and brave tended to fare less well than the small and cunning. I looked at Timon with new respect, then hastily back at the controls as the altitude meter beeped at me.

"Was Father impressed?"

Timon shrugged again, a small, graceful lifting of narrow shoulders. "I got thrashed for going without telling anyone and then he tripled my debit limit."

I laughed. "Don't spend it all at once! I didn't see the skin on display."

"I hung it in my room."

"But no one can see it there!"

"I can."

That would not have been enough for me, I would have flaunted the thing for all it was worth, but we were very different, Timon and I.



Once we had left the parks and homesteads of Nuovo Loundes, I piloted the flyabout into the desolation of the sour lands. Mile after mile of weed-choked ruins passed under our wings. Our engine-noise panicked a little swarm of scavvies, their carapaces lifting to flash the orange alarm of their kind, eye-stalks waving madly as they tried to pinpoint the source of the noise. They had cornered a rat and the creature took the chance to dash for freedom. I was not sure whose side I was on. I hate scavvies, I hate their stink and their unnatural silence and their triangular heads and their jointed scratching feet.

We crossed the river, wide, green, muddy and boiling with life, on into the heart of the long-dead industrial past. Here were great swathes of poisoned ground, heaps of slowly crumbling slag, giant rusted girders and pinnacles, fallen buildings, and masses of plant-life working to soften and devour the last traces of man's avarice.

"There." Timon had not spoken for hours, now he leaned forward into the constraint of his safety belt, staring through the moulded perspex screen. "Over there. You can land on the top."

A hill rose out of the humps of vegetation, like a

great tomb or altar, flat as if a giant had taken a knife and sliced off the point of a pyramid. I circled warily then very cautiously lowered the flyabout onto the middle of the plateau.

We climbed out, stretching cramped limbs. After the steady drone of the flyabout, silence crashed in on me, so that I scuffed my feet just to hear the sound of my boots and reassure myself that I had not gone deaf. There was no wind. The sun pressed down with hot hands, a subtle pressure on the top of my head.

The platform was made of slabs of rock, real rock not concrete, fitted so cunningly together that no plant had managed to finger its way between them, or tilt and disturb the perfection of the marble floor. Stubs of pillars like broken teeth ringed the open space, then there was just blue sky and silence, except that on one side, a part of the wall remained in the shape of a pointed arch, a narrow, perfect, glorious window onto the air. I walked to it to look out, even though there was open space on the other three sides. The green and brown carpet of undulating growth was something I did not wish to see, it was too threatening, unable to conform to the view I required, even though I did not know what it was I wanted, maybe a park, a garden run wild, not this reclaiming jungle.

"Look," Timon said, his voice very small in that limitless place. He was picking his way around the shattered wall, so that he stood between the window and the slope, upon a path or ledge of stone the width of a slab. I followed him, very aware of the drop at my side.

A small rim of debris had been blown by the wind, packing into the angle between wall and floor, where plants had seeded and managed to find precarious purchase. When Timon pulled on a tuft of grass, it came away. Embedded in the scant earth were shards that caught the light, bits of glass. Timon gingerly probed behind the largest of the plants, a woody, fibrous vine, and brought out a handful of glass, spreading the pieces across the wind-scoured marble.

They shone in the sunlight, all colours, smeared jewels made of light.

"Glass," he breathed, fingering them as if they were jewels indeed, or still forbidden.

"So? Someone up here had illegal glass and I expect it was smashed when everyone realized —"

"No! This wasn't illegal glass, it's glass from before then, when it was allowed! This is ancient glass, Sven, real glass, free glass!"

"Oh come on, so it's glass, so what?"

He sighed, patient with my perplexity. "This is a special place, you can sense it, can't you?"

"Well, yes..."

"And I'm sure that all around here were glass windows, and pillars, and white stone steps, and open space. The industries came later, can't you feel how terribly old this is?"

I nodded, humouring him. He gathered up his collection of glass fragments and carried them around to the platform, where he sat down a way from the flyabout and spread them out, rubbing off the earth so that they burned with sunlight. "Come and sit down. Try to imagine how it was here, how strange, how magnificent!"



"How draughty," I said but I went to join him. "You're an incurable romantic,"

"You're a cynic."

"Sceptic, actually," I corrected him. The glass winked and twinkled as I moved my head, a mosaic of brightness. "I bet you missed me." I was teasing him, totally unprepared for him to turn his head to stare into my eyes, his own brimming with tears.

"I thought I'd die without you."

"Timon."

He had always been the quiet solemn child, the one who would not cry for a lost toy or bawl about cuts and bruises. I could not recall seeing him weep before. Because this was Timon, he had to be taken seriously. I reached out a hand, grasping the slim, bony shoulder through his clothes. "Timon, what's the matter?"

He shook his head, his black hair flying loose, wiping his eyes with his fingers.

"Sorry. I'm just so glad to have you back."

"There's no need to cry about it!"

That was an opening for a denial – I wasn't crying! – and another accusation and a brotherly tussle, but it did not happen. Timon drew in a shuddering breath and said "I know," and reached up to close his small, cool fingers over my hand, where it rested on his shoulder. I felt shaky and dry-mouthed, my heart racing.

"I've missed you too." I realized that it was true. Even when he was just a little kid, he was the one I liked to have around when I had something to be proud of. Other siblings were fine to watch a film with, or for information, technical assistance, gossip or a fight. Timon gave something more subtle, an unconditional moral support that was all the more valuable because I knew that it was offered only to me.

He looked at the chips of glass strewn around on the pavement and I felt him give a little jump, a tightening of muscles. I automatically glanced down and caught sight of something dark, a reflection passing across the shards. Of course I looked up, expecting to see a cloud, a large bird, even a glider high on a thermal, but there was nothing in the sky. Timon was staring into the glass, slowly gathering the pieces closer together with one hand.

"What is it, Ti?"

"I don't know. Do you believe in the Gryffe?" He pronounced it "grief" rather than "griff".

"Of course, like I believe in the bogey man, werewolves, the tooth fairy at the bottom of the garden and the Blessed Giorgius and his merry band of imps –"

"No, do you believe they ever existed?" His tone was sharp, insistent.

"I suppose something did but that was thousands of years ago."

"Only one thousand," he told me. "This was a temple dedicated to the Gryffe."

"So it was some crack-brain religion." I had never had much time for early history, recent politics were more my field.

"This was the great temple of the Gryffe," Timon continued in a hushed voice, "This is where they held out longest in the war that finished them. The Gryffe and the Brachis died together here in a great conflagration and mankind emerged the victor and

promptly built factories to pollute the air and the ground and the water so thoroughly that they'd never want to return."

"They could hardly return if they'd perished in a great conflagration," I pointed out, hiding my amusement that intelligent Timon should be so captivated by old folk tales. I knew that the Gryffe had existed, there were fossilized remains to prove it but the tales of war and conquest were prettied-up versions of man's typical arrogance in wiping out an entire species for the hell of it. The Gryffe had gone the way of the pygmy dogbear, the balloonweed, the hairy illaphaunt, the feral sheep, the marsh-stalker and hundreds of others.

"This is where they're remembered," Timon whispered, ignoring me. "They're still reflected in the glass. They were so strong, you see, their spirits are still around to haunt us. I came up here and camped for days and I dreamed about them – such vivid dreams!" He stared, wide-eyed and trembling, into the distance. "God, they were beautiful, Sven! We should never have destroyed them. No wonder we haven't been allowed to make glass for a thousand years! If people started seeing the Gryffe again, who knows what might happen?"

"Stop it, Timon!" If I had not seen the passing shadows in the glass, I would have been irritated by him, but now I was scared. He turned and reached up with both hands, closing his fingers lightly on either side of my face, holding my head so that he could stare into my eyes.

"I'm going to show you my secret, Sven, the thing I found up here on my own. I can't keep it to myself any longer and you're the only one in the world I trust to keep it between the two of us."

"I don't know if I want to know."

"It isn't anything dreadful," he said, "Just wonderful and tragic and heart-wrenching."

"Isn't that bad enough?" I grumbled but I allowed him to pull me to my feet and lead me to the edge of the platform.



It was a difficult climb, bad enough for someone of his slight stature, impossible for a larger man unless he was very fit and agile. Three years of playing various sports for my college team just about gave me the edge, although we had to use the flyabout's emergency tow-rope to lower ourselves over a final overhang into a fissure in the side of the hill. Wind and storm had eroded the rock, enabling the secret inner chamber to be reached. It had been perfectly hidden. Timon had been prompted to explore after seeing a cloud of tiny bats emerge from the rock below his feet, he had climbed down the vines to discover the cave. His foolishness and courage left me speechless.

We crouched in the darkness, playing Timon's pocket torch over a guano-encrusted stone table. In the front of the table was a recess, once closed by a carved wooden door which was now nothing but splinters, and within, shrouded by webs and cushioned on dust, an egg. Its shape was unmistakable, slightly more pointed at one end than the other, perfectly smooth, its colour impos-



sible to guess. It was the length of my hand.

"A Gryffe's egg," Timon breathed.

"Don't touch it, it might explode, and hell, will it be addled!"

"It'll be desiccated after all this time." He reached out and with one finger, wiped a streak of dust from the side of the egg. The colour was revealed to be a soft blue, perhaps with a hint of green, it was difficult to tell in the torch-light. The surface was smooth like fine crockery.

"It's a model," I said. "You know, an effigy to worship. They won't have left a real egg."

"It's warm," Timon told me in a hushed voice. "Feel it."

"No, thanks."

"Oh God, Sven, it's warm!"

My half-brother extended both hands and before I could stop him, he had slipped his fingers around and beneath the egg, and lifted it up and brought it to his chest, lovingly smoothing the dust from its surface. "Feel it, Sven, feel it!"

To humour him, I took the egg. I had thought that it must be made out a substance that reflected the heat of a hand, like polystyrene foam, an insulator, but the egg weighed heavy and dense, and it was warm and it did feel alive. I imagined that tiny tremors ran through it, as though some unhatched creature flexed inside.

Timon tucked the egg into his shirt and secured his belt and jacket around it. We climbed back up the cliff, aware that the sun was going down, that a breeze had risen to blow the scent of plants across the hill and that we were hungry and excited and not a little terrified. Regaining the platform, sweaty and shaky, I hauled Timon up after me and dusted my hands, wincing at the abrasions. He was busy checking that his damned egg was intact. I looked around, at the sun's rays blazing magenta and puce across a pale mauve sky. Something flared on the horizon, an interplanetary burning off into the stratosphere or a wayward meteorite, a shooting star.

"It'll be dark in a bit," I grumbled, "The batteries are almost flat, I can't risk flying until they can recharge in the sunlight."

"We'll go back in the morning," Timon said calmly.

"Yeah, sure, and we'll be bloody hungry and cold –"

"Sven, please shut up."

I did, God knows why. I rooted around in the flyabout and unearthed a stash of choc bars, a packet of biscuits and a can of beer. We shared them, watching the sun go down. Timon wrapped up the egg and put it in the locker, then we crawled into the back of the flyabout and closed the door. I opaqued the polarizing perspex windows, thankful that dear Father had allowed me the up-market flyabout with the folding back seat. Timon huddled close against me and I put an arm around him for warmth.

He smelled faintly sweet, unlike the stale and acrid odour of boys I knew. He was very small and frail, bones as fine as a bird's. I shifted to a more comfortable position and his hair touched my face, when I looked down I could see the stark pallor of his cheek over bone, a curve of lashes, the glitter of a narrow eye. I felt

that I was not watching my half-brother but someone else, a person with unexplored dimensions. Yet he was not a stranger. I had met him before at some time, this living, breathing, Timon-shaped being, I knew the contours of him under my arm. Recognition came at a very deep, instinctive level, I would have been unable to put into words my sense of completeness when I felt him relax against me, my satisfaction at having him there. Yet there was nothing tranquil about my pleasure, my heart was racing out of control. I did not understand what was happening to me. When Timon's hand splayed out across my chest, fingers slipping through the gap in my shirt to touch my nipple, I almost exploded.

"Ti, don't –"

"Ssh."

I lay back, concentrating on breathing steadily, trying not to tighten my hold on him. He slithered onto me and his mouth locked onto mine. I could have stopped him, perhaps, but my limbs would not obey me.

I had kissed before, so why had I never experienced anything like this? Had I always wanted this wicked, viper's tongue sliding between my teeth, this slim, forbidden body that clung to mine with such desperate urgency? The need in me was a hot tide of pain, I was submerged in it, overwhelmed, as he knew I would be. Maybe it was all in the pheromones. I use that as my excuse.

All the more blissful for being unlawful, the exploration of his slender limbs, his skin so smooth under my touch. His masculinity was subtle, just a minimal flare of his ribcage, a widening at the shoulders, the narrowness of waist and hips, easily missed, until he grasped my hand and pulled it down to the fully masculine place I dared not explore. He wanted me just as eagerly as I needed him.

I hardly noticed the small strangeness in among all the enormity of our crime, that as I entered him, something gave way to me, a breaking of a taut membranous resistance that made him cry out sharply in surprise or hurt, and then a redirection, a shifting and reorganization inside him. He groaned and writhed then I was pressed into a place that was smooth and moist and muscular, so that it was like sex with a girl, not a boy at all.

I pulled away from him, slippery with my own juices. I did not speak, retreating into a younger persona of sulky adolescent in my guilt and perplexity. Neither did Timon say anything, just gave a small, contented sigh and curled up to sleep, while I silently cursed him and myself.



I spent nights lying awake, running over and over my recollections of the events of that evening, until the edges were rubbed off and all that remained were a vivid sunset, a dull blue egg and a moment of sweaty and illegal passion, minor wonders and minor sins. I would catch Timon watching me sometimes, secret glances that skittered away when I tried to meet his gaze with a glare of my own. He kept to himself as ever, no one else commented on his behaviour and gradu-



ally my anger thawed into a vague discomfort and a large measure of curiosity. I wondered what the little idiot intended to do with a Gryffe's egg. It must be worth a fortune if it was genuine, a fortune even in our family's terms. You could buy up half of Loundes with that egg.

In the end, I searched him out, finding him in the library amid a scatter of very old papers and books.

"Looking up Gryffes in the encyclopedia?" I asked, hoping that speaking the word loudly would make him nervous of eavesdroppers. He calmly covered over his notes and stood up.

"No, I'm not." He gathered the papers methodically, refusing to be discomforted. "I wondered how long it would be before you came to see me."

I snorted, annoyed by a feeling that I was being controlled. "Yeah, so I'm here. What have you done with it?"

"Hatched it," he replied with a taut smile. "What did you expect?"

I stared at him, I probably sneered. "Right, of course, I should have guessed. I see no Gryffe." I pretended to flinch and stare from window to window through the tinted plastic panes.

"You're looking in the wrong places," Timon told me. "Come to my room tonight and I'll show you."

"Hold on, brother, no more of your tricks," I warned with my skin prickling. God, I wanted to go to him! How could I resist?

"There were never any tricks." With that he turned his back and walked away, leaving me at a loss, defeated, caught on the twin hooks of inquisitiveness and desire.



He was lying on his back on the bed, naked, damn him, and it lay on his far side against his thigh, chin resting on his bare belly, watching the door with diamond eyes, watching me as I came in and stopped in shock, watching my mingled dread and wonder.

"Oh God!" I said, "Oh my God" as if an omnipotent being might hear me and help.

"Close the door, Sven," Timon instructed, his voice low. His skin shone in the subdued light, white and wet like a freshly caught fish. I shut the door and walked slowly towards him, stopping as the black head turned and the Gryffe hissed gently. Timon raised a languid hand and stroked it, sliding his fingers over the ridges of its armoured brow and the rose-thorn spines that ought to have drawn blood. Its head was the size of his hand, its body cat-sized, with a long spiky tail and clawed feet and wings that were folded beneath a carapace that shone like jet, like polished wet rock, and which showed at the very edges the blood red lining of its underside.

"What the hell," I began and then demanded "What the fuck is that?" and felt stupid as he looked at me with resignation. "It looks like some overgrown scavvy larva."

It was a lie. Scavvies are chitinous creatures living in hives in the wastes, they feed on carrion and anything stupid enough to stay still. They are unintelligent. No one could look into the level, crystal gaze of





the Gryffe and accuse it of stupidity. It parted its jaws a fraction and extended its tongue, black, like the rest of it, and ran the tip across the shivery flesh of Timon's abdomen. He sighed, I saw his chest rise and fall. There was something proprietorial in that touch, it was not the slavish licking of a pet dog. The Gryffe caressed him like a lover.

"What have you done, Ti?" I edged closer, wary of the unblinking stare. "How did you hatch it?"

"Just kept it warm, that was all."

"All? That's impossible?"

He shrugged, lay still. I stepped to the side of the bed and earned another warning sizzle, like water dropping into hot fat. "What's the matter with you?" I demanded.

"Nothing." There was a challenge in his gaze.

"You must have gone mad. This can't be a Gryffe, it's got to be some scavvy subspecies."

"The Gryffe's descended from the same stock." Timon raised himself onto one elbow, seemingly unconscious of his nakedness. I tried not to look at the black hair and the pink curl of genitals at the junction of his thighs, instead I found myself staring at the dark tender buds of his nipples. The Gryffe licked its lips and watched me, a glittering sculpture in jet and crystal. "Don't you know about the city of Brache and the Gryffe, about the empire of a thousand years, and the peasant uprising that finished them?"

"Oh for God's sake!"

"It's true, Sven!"

"You're living in a fantasy world. The Gryffe are extinct, this is some mutant scavvy."

I turned and walked out, my brain a hot cauldron of confusion, of fear and desire and shame and excitement. I considered denouncing him, exposing his secret to the family so that they could decide what to do, whether to have his damned Gryffe put down or locked in a menagerie. He must have sensed my anger. By the time I had finally made up mind, he had gone.

Timon, part of my life, piece of my heart, found then lost again, Timon walked away from me. I raged in secret, how could he have done this? He knew I would not have betrayed him, not really, I had too much to lose. Timon, Timon, I lay awake in sweaty fear and misery, grinding my teeth on his name through the nights.

No one else showed much concern. Timon could look after himself. Someone said that he had gone to visit the cousins on the coast, others that he had a girl and had gone to live with her for a while. Timon was living with a mistress, hunting dogbears, swimming in the sun, hitched a lift off-world. Timon would be back in a day, a week, a year. Money vanished regularly in his name from the family account. Only I fretted about him and I did that in the seclusion of my room. It was obvious what I had to do, I just took time to do it.

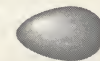


The city of Brache was gone. I had expected desolation, ruins and the wind and rain, broken stones, not this expanse of peaceful farmland. I checked my map but I knew that I was in the right place, the flyabout had a sophisticated navigation system and I was a

good enough pilot to know my own location, certainly when I was within sight of a reservoir and a hydroelectric dam. Nothing remained of Brache, nothing at all. No walls of broken temples, no trace of houses, except in the faint lines visible from the air, shading of growing crops and undulations in the ground. Brache was utterly destroyed and I knew that Timon would not be found here. I visited the nearest town and spent an afternoon in the local museum but it seemed as if even the historians were ashamed of their distant past. The exhibits concentrated on later settlements, on the steady small successes of the area, on the growth of the spinweed trade and the breeding of cattle. The rise and fall of Brache was included in a brief discourse on the geology and prehistory of the area, it merited a few lines. The courage of the peasants in the great revolt earned more mention than the empire of a thousand years. Brache was relegated to myth.

I began a systematic search for ruins and history. I think that my father was vaguely alarmed by my change of direction but deemed it wise to allow this passion to burn itself out, like the lust for an unsuitable woman. If he had but known!

The Brachian empire had been one of society rather than artefacts. Their temples had not been many and those had been destroyed, along with the objects that had graced them, glass and stone and pottery. The Brachis may have begun as a nucleus based on a family or tribe. They rose to greatness because of one ability alone, that of easy association with the Gryffe. The Gryffe! Legends tell of their beauty, of their ruthless intelligence, of their charm and lust and their terrible end at the hands of an oppressed people. I learned as much as I could about them from text-books and then I contacted my professor at college and used the family's influence to obtain an interview with an eminent historian.



Doctor Evangelis was younger than I expected, an angular woman who invited me into her office with barely restrained impatience. I imagined how she must resent this rich dilettante taking up her time.

"I appreciate your help, doctor," I said, which she acknowledged with a minimal nod, "I want to know about the Gryffe."

"The Gryffe were relatives of the greater armoured scavengers—" she began, and I interrupted her, which took her by surprise.

"Yes, I know that. *Hymenoptosaurus gryphon gryphon*, the scavvies being *Hymenoptosaurus blatta*. Tell me what you make of this, Doctor Evangelis." I reached down and took the package out of my bag. I did not watch her as I unwrapped the shell but I felt her gaze prick my skin. Then her attention switched entirely to the Gryffe egg.

Timon had pieced the shell carefully back together after the Gryffe had hatched, only hairline cracks and a small hole at one end showed that this was no longer an intact egg. It had been in his collection, a drab blue-green oval among the riotous colours and shapes of the sea-shells, not worth a second glance to any casual browser.



Doctor Evangelis reached out to touch it then withdrew her hands as if she feared to damage something precious. She wiped her palms down her thighs and asked in a voice that strove to sound casual, "Where did you find it?"

"My brother found it. Is it a Gryffe's egg?"

She reached into her desk without looking down. For a moment I was cold with apprehension, believing that she intended to rob me, but she only brought out a magnifying lens and leaned across to examine the surface of the egg.

"As far as I can tell, yes, but in the last century there were fake eggs that – oh, my God! Be careful!"

I gently teased apart the largest fragments of the egg, revealing the inner membranes. They were drying, adhering to the inner surface of the shell, but obviously quite fresh.

"No." She sat back slowly, reluctantly. "What is this, some sort of student prank? A giant *H. blatta* variety?" Her eyes were as hard as glass. "Please get out of my office and stop wasting my time."

I rewrapped the egg, reverently, regretting this visit with all my heart.

"What did they look like, Doctor Evangelis? The Gryffe, what did they look like? Please?"

She must have been furious and very disappointed. I had raised such hopes in her. I did not know that only tiny shards of egg had ever been found, for the young Gryffe would normally eat the shells for their mineral content and Timon had intervened to rescue this egg for his collection. She stood up, swaying as if balanced between two conflicting intentions, then almost spat words at me.

"Get out and take your damned egg with you!"

"As soon as you tell me what the Gryffe looked like."

"I'll show you what the Gryffe looked like!" She grabbed my sleeve, pulling me along with her. She was furious to the edge of tears. I followed, heart beating fast, clutching the bag with the precious egg. She took me into the depths of the building, into a small, deep room with multiple locks, throwing open doors that creaked with disuse. She switched on a light and pulled aside a dusty cloth, to reveal the greatest artefact to have survived the conflagration. She turned around all my preconceptions about the Brachis and their civilization with that one furious gesture.

The Gryffe was of natural volcanic glass, black and shining, a statue of ground and polished obsidian. It was all curves, as if natural conchoidal fractures had suggested how the thing should be worked. The spines at its edges were as fine and brittle as paper. The Gryffe leaped into the air, one clawed foot melting into a base of unworked rock. Wings unfurled from a raised carapace, traces of red pigment remained to suggest where the warning colours had been applied. Its eyes were brilliant, twin cut gems that threw back cascades of light. Only chips on the edges of the spines indicated the great age of the statue. I could entertain no more doubts that Timon had hatched a Gryffe.

"Oh God," I breathed; then, "How big did they grow?"

"Big," she said dully, anger fading to disappointment. "They had an internal skeleton as well as an external jointed armour, there was no real limit to

their size. They could reach around four, five metres."

"Oh shit." I turned and saw her eyes, the sudden apprehension, a realization that my reactions were not what she had expected from a prankster. "Thanks," I said. "You're very kind. You're right, it is a new variety of scavvy. It looked nothing like that. I must appear some sort of sentimental idiot."

"*Hymenoptosaurus gryphon gryphon* has been extinct for a thousand years," she said pompously. "Please excuse me, I've work to do. I suggest you speak to someone in the biology department, one of the taxonomists, they'll no doubt be interested in your egg."

I exited as gracefully as I could. I was scared but I was also exultant and determined. I began my hunt in earnest where the Gryffe had once been worshipped, the sites of the temples.

Scattered here and there about Nuovo, differing in design, some older than others, all razed to the ground when the conflagration spread around the world, the temples and palaces of the Brachis were testaments to their lost power. They were sited in beautiful and often inaccessible places, the sides of mountains, tops of hills, amid the forests of the Lungs or in the far north, amid plains of ice. I flew from one to the next in my flyabout, marvelling at the dedication of those long-dead people. I imagined teams of horses dragging carriages up those mountain paths and then I laughed and shivered in one breath. The Brachis would have flown from mountain peak to palace roof on Gryffe-back. Scavvies bear only vestigial wings but the Gryffe could fly.

Another day, another hotel and another trip to a temple, I was becoming a dedicated tourist. The more accessible temples were those in or near cities, I doubted that Timon would dare take his Gryffe there but I visited them anyway for my own reassurance. At each, I would ask the custodian or guide if anyone had seen this boy, and give out a copy of a picture, and offer a reward that made eyes widen in greed or wonder. I explained that he was my half-brother, that he had run away after a family squabble and I wanted to know that he was safe. I gave out a contact number and kept hoping.

Months went by. I wondered how he kept his Gryffe hidden, how he fed it, whether he allowed it to fly. When the call came, I was getting desperate.

I had been wrong about the temples, but not entirely wrong. He had not made his hiding place there but he had visited, as I hoped he would. Someone had seen him and remembered the reward and found the number and got round to calling me eventually, after days had passed and Timon could have gone half way across the continent, but it was the first clue and I flew to Golarion not daring to hope.



Golarion was the arm-pit of the pointing hand of Sentaramis isthmus. Once a sea-port dedicated to the export of woven spinweed, then a space-port in the heady days of expansionism, it was now a drab holiday resort with a partly silted harbour. In winter, the pleasure craft were beached like dead onclefish on the sand. Golarion was a miserable town huddled with its back to



the wind and the sea. Bored youths drifted between the bars and the harbour wall, pausing to throw pebbles at the beach-combing birds. It was a copy of a thousand other towns, a replica redolent of childhood memories, gaudy small excitements, half-kept promises. I wandered the shore, trying to recapture a time when I longed for the bright artificiality of the painted rides and arcades, their designs altered every year in superficial respects, their essences never changing.

Even here, fashion decreed the use of glass, the stuff must have poured molten from vats all across the world to supply so many trinkets, so much glitter. Strings of transparent beads clashed and whirled in the gale, broken glass crunched underfoot. Cheap glass statuettes were offered as prizes behind the plastic shutters of the stalls. Boys in black postured and circled in ritual combat, brandishing switch-blades of heat-toughened glass. I looked into glass and saw dark reflections.

No one else seemed to notice, or to care, that the facets of glass darkened and flashed with shadows while no birds flew overhead. Golarion had spent so long on the edge of things that its inhabitants could not believe that events happened here first, that anything could arise in the town unless heralded by reports from more immediate and fashionable places. So glass played strange tricks with the light, did it? Somewhere else, glass must be reflecting paradise or crying aloud. They were not used to glass here, unfamiliar stuff with unfathomable properties. Old men and women shook their heads at the follies of youth while adolescents pretended disdain and they all ignored their instincts. I stared into glass and saw the Gryffe, wrought huge, flying on sky-encompassing wings, throwing back heads the size of houses to call out across the ocean, soundlessly trapped in the matrix of the glass, but for how much longer?

I stood on a cliff overlooking the bay, Golarion spread out before me like the strewn contents of a trash-can, unplanned, damp and smelling of fish. I could see the fairground, with its tawdry ornaments glittering in the light of a winter sunset. I watched as they winked out, every watery reflection momentarily defaced by a great black shadow, and that was when I realized that not merely Golarion but the entire world was haunted by the Gryffe. I could hold a glass in one hand and see scary monsters in it, but out here I looked out over the vastness of sea and sky and imagined wings that swept from coast to coast and throats open wide enough to swallow Golarion whole. I don't know whether I wept for Nuovo, for the Gryffe or for Timon, the beautiful boy I had lost.



I went looking for glass and found a little company of artists, painters and potters, who sold hand-crafted goods in their own shop. One of them worked glass. The centrepiece of his display was a statuette of amber glass. It shocked me, although it did not have the power of the obsidian Gryffe. A crested beast stood on hind legs, caught in the act of thrashing the air with its wings. It was a mythological gryphon, part lizard and part horse, with wings far too narrow

for its weight, but I went in. The shop smelled of sweet wood-shavings and solvents. A young man came out wiping his hands in a rag, smiling too much.

"The statue." I waved at it. "How much?"

He smiled and nodded and I repeated the tickling words from the translator in my ear. He asked some outrageous price and was obviously astonished when I brought out my wallet and paid in the local currency. I waited while he wrapped the glass and then I went out, feeling stifled and annoyed.

A day flying around the area showed that the phenomenon of shadows faded out to the east of Golarion, and increased as I travelled westwards until the amber glass fairly pulsed with darkness chasing light. I feared that something would break out of the statuette as it lay on the passenger seat of the flyabout. I landed on a dirt road and allowed the flyabout to travel slowly, jolting on the rough surface. This was poor farmland in winter, a sea of brown dormancy and herds of glum, stolid animals. When I parked and got out, the wind bit hold of my extremities and I hastily pulled on my jacket.

The houses were few and looked ancient, made of local materials, squat dwellings of stone and wood. Light shone between chinks in curtains, through unreflective, reassuring plastic. No fashions here, no shades and phantoms. Grazing cattle stared blankly at me, chewing on bundles of fibres. Apart from the suck of mud as they moved their feet, and their puffing breath, I heard only the wind. I was waiting for a spine-chilling cry like the lament of a lost soul but it never came. I crept around like a thief, watching the glass statue for modulations in the whirl of reflections, seeing at one moment a glittering eye, then a sweep of passing wing, a curled claw, a thorn as pure and smooth as bone. The Gryffe appeared like the pieces of a child's puzzle, I could mentally piece together the whole beast bit by bit if I waited long enough and if I had any need, but memory supplied the real thing.

When at last I knocked on a door, I was taken aback to see a stranger outlined by the light from inside. I made up some lame story about looking for my brother's address and losing my way, not aided by the long pauses while my translator tried to keep up. The inhabitants shrugged, unable to help me.

Maybe I was mistaken, this was just a place where the Gryffe's essence had lasted longest for some historical reason. I tried the next house, then the next.

He wore the local robust, bulky clothes against the winter cold but my brother could never be disguised as a rustic farm-hand. His complexion was too unsullied, his hands had never known manual labour. The opened door breathed warm air in my face as he stared at me. He did not seem surprised, merely resigned.

"Did you think I couldn't find you?" I asked, my voice thick in my throat. I wanted to touch his face, crush him in my arms.

"No," he agreed after a long pause. He stood back and I ducked my head to enter the room. There was a smell of cooking, dowdy furniture that was obviously rented with the house, a fireplace that actually burned fuel for heat, not effect, and not entirely successfully by the feel of it. Timon's heavy clothing was



no disguise but a necessity.

"Why did you run away?" I demanded. "Why didn't you trust me?" He gave me his oblique shrug instead of an answer. "Timon, where is it?"

"Out," he said shortly. "Have you eaten?"

"Fuck eating, this isn't a social visit!"

"I'm not going to run away," he said. "You might as well eat with me. I don't owe anyone any explanation, frankly."

I opened my mouth, shut it again. Was this my Timon? He certainly looked the same, if thinner and sharper, fined down to cold bone.

"Not even for love?" I asked. It was his turn to be surprised, it was not a word I used. "Timon, please." Another unfamiliar word. "I've been worried sick about you."

That got to him. He sighed and closed the door, bolting it with a crude iron latch. "Don't think you can make me leave here," he told me, as if he expected me to drag him off in chains.

"Why should I, if this is where you want to be? I don't understand why, it's a dump."

"It does me at the moment," he said, obscure as ever.

"You could have hidden anywhere you wanted, why here? Was it one of the Brachis' major conurbations or something?"

"I don't know. He wanted to come here."

"He? The Gryffe?"

He nodded and walked across the room to a doorway into a cramped kitchen area. I watched him, realizing that the spring had gone from his stride, his lithe youthfulness was weighed down by some tremendous responsibility. I was tempted to tell him that unless he explained what was going on, I would call in the entire family to sort him out. He would never trust me again. I would have to have patience, not one of my virtues.

He moved about, getting out food, heating something in a pan, cutting slices of meat, competent as ever. When had he learned to cook? He brought in a tray and laid out the meal on a wooden table, bowls of soup, cold meat and pickles and bread. The food had the unfamiliar taint I expected in a foreign country, the herbs strong and the bread made from a local hardy grain, but it was all acceptable to anyone who had lived on student fare for three years. I realized as we ate that the silence was neither suspicious nor unfriendly.

"You're glad I found you, aren't you?"

He caught his breath, coughed on a crumb and grinned reluctantly. "I rather thought you might."

"So you led me this dance just for fun?" I was not really angry, I was too relieved to be reunited with him and he knew it.

"I had to get away."

"You could have said. Why didn't you? I'd have helped you."

"I didn't want to drag you down with me."

"Don't talk crap."

Timon placed his knife and fork meticulously onto his empty plate. "You don't know the first thing about it," he said. The lack of anger in his voice, as if he was just stating the obvious, really hurt me.

"You could bloody well tell me, then, couldn't you?"

"Oh yes, you and me against the whole world, you'd like that, wouldn't you? Sven Hassan the great hero of the age. We're not going to be the heroes, we're the villains. I don't think we ought to be villains, things have got to be different this time round but who else is going to believe that? We've all been raised to believe in the big bad beast in the forest, the Gryffe who stole the children away in the night and ruled the sky. Gryffe and Brachis, monstrous dictators both. God help us!"

Timon got to his feet and paced across the room, hands clasped in front of him.

"The Brachis all died out, they're not going to hatch out of some egg," I pointed out, alarmed by his vehemence.

"Aren't they?" He turned around, his face white and strained. "Aren't they, just? Sven, I'm so bloody scared!"

A couple of strides took me to him, although he seemed to shrink away from me even as I threw my arms around him.

"It'll work out, kid," I told him, wondering how.

"I wish I could believe that." He was trying to get away, his hands braced against my chest. I could not understand what was the matter with him, why he would not allow himself the luxury of a brief hug, a few tears if he wished.

"Timon, where's that damned monster?"

"Out, flying."

"You let it go out alone?"

"He's got to learn to use his wings." Timon broke free and began clearing the table, a bundle of nervous energy. "He's wary, he keeps away from people. He keeps searching all the time, it's a compulsion."

"For others of his kind?" For the first time I felt some sympathy for the little beast.

"For eggs," he whispered. "There have to be other eggs hidden away. He can sense the places where the Gryffe were strongest, we think that there might be eggs secreted somewhere, waiting to be hatched."

I noted, but did not comment on his use of the word "we".

"What made him hatch now, after all this time?"

"I did."

"Yes, but why —"

"No, I mean it, my presence triggered the egg out of dormancy. It must have been when I first found it, I touched it or breathed on it and started the hatching process."

"So anyone might have started it?"

He shook his head. "It might sound egotistical but no, only someone like me." He went into the kitchen carrying plates and I followed him, anxious to keep him talking while he was in the mood.

"Fine, so what's special about you in that particular sense?"

He filled a kettle with water and put it into a rustic metallic contraption which buzzed, some sort of heating device. "Hormones, pheromones, I don't really know."

I watched him, thinking about him, about the family, myself. "Ti, what happened to the Brachis?"

"Exactly."

"You are kidding me, aren't you?"

"Wish I was, brother."



"What was so special about them? Why did the Brachis alone have a special relationship with the Gryffe? Was it just chance that they happened to learn to control them?"

"Who controlled whom? Good question. I think of them as symbiotic, like certain plants and fungi, or like the scavies and the sugar moths, you guard me and keep me safe and protect my eggs, I'll secrete heavenly ambrosia for you to sup and we'll all be happy and the devil take everyone else."

"But why couldn't anyone else get in on the act? Were the Brachis that different?"

"I believe they were. Are. Will be."

The kettle was starting to bubble noisily, he lifted it and poured water into a mug and added powdered spider-leaf tea. I wrinkled my nose at the spicy aroma.

"How can you drink that stuff?"

"It settles my indigestion. You can have beer, I've got a couple of packs somewhere."

We took our drinks back to the fireside, where Timon lowered himself into one of the chairs and sipped from his mug, frowning. There was an awkwardness about him that discomfited me. He did not move right, he was very careful of himself, almost as if he was injured and made aware of his own fragility. I was afraid for him.

"You're only giving me half a story," I remarked.

He smiled ruefully. "I know. It isn't easy."

"I won't betray you."

"I wish I could believe that – no, I don't mean to offend. If you did know it all you'd think differently."

"Try me. I'll give you my word."

"Let me think about it. There are occasions on which you'd over-ride any vow you might have made. If I was lying injured and I begged you not to tell anyone, you'd go off and fetch a doctor and betray me, believing it was for my own good. I know you. Pack-leader syndrome. Father knows best. It's how you're bred and raised, you can't help it."

I stared at him, astounded. He was right. I had always been allowed to blunder along making my own mistakes, learning by experience. Perhaps I had already betrayed him in small ways without intending any harm at all.

"I'm sorry, Ti."

"Don't be. I might need your strength one day." He shifted in the chair as if something was biting him. "He'll be back soon. Are you ready to meet him? He's grown up a lot in a short time, he's had to."

"What's his name?"

"He isn't a pet!"

"I know that but surely you call him something?"

"Gryffe, usually. He answers to need rather than call."

I stared into the flames, seeing burning buildings, great black monsters falling from the sky, men dying on sword and spear. Timon was silent, lost in his own thoughts. We both became aware of a gentle scratching at the plastic window.



Timon got up and went to let in the creature of the night. I could feel my ankles and palms sweating, I

admit to feeling more nervous than ever in my life.

It had grown far more than I expected, when it sat up on its hindquarters the Gryffe was as high as my thigh. It came in slowly, aware that I was present, watching me with its sentient crystal stare.

"This is my brother Sven," Timon remarked and the Gryffe looked me up and down, opened its mouth a crack and said:

"S-hen?"

"Sven."

"S-ven," it said and I said "Oh, shit" and it grinned at me. The rigidity of its scaly jaw precluded any other expression.

"He's not a great conversationalist," Timon remarked, his voice just a shade unsteady.

"What does he eat?" I asked, rather wildly, feeling on the edge of hysteria.

"He's omnivorous like us. He likes to hunt small rodents but that's for sport and to strengthen his wings and his reflexes, he eats more or less what I do – a lot of it."

Built along the lines of a scavvy but more elegant, the Gryffe had powerful hind legs on which it would be able to run, front legs long enough to walk on all fours like a mammal but with clawed three-fingered hands with opposing digits, and the third pair of limbs consisted of the wings, furled safely beneath the carapace along its back and sides. Its tail was long and tapering to provide balance. It was armed down its spine and along its tail with a wicked set of curved spikes, terminating with a razor-sharp spray like a bunch of thorns.

"Are you staying the night?" Timon asked.

"Am I invited?"

"Don't be silly."

"Yes, in that case."

Timon returned to his chair, catching his breath as he sat down. The Gryffe swung its muzzle towards him and gave a little sound that was unmistakably interrogative, a "huh?" in its throat.

"I'm fine," Timon whispered hurriedly, forcing a smile. Seeing that I was watching him, he added "My digestion's a bit off, I think it's the food. I get gut-ache a lot. He fusses."

The Gryffe walked sinuously across the room, claws silent on the drab carpet, and settled itself draped over the arm of Timon's chair, resting one foreleg and its chin over him so that it watched me across Timon, nose buried in the bulky fleece of his jacket.

He wanted to know what had happened at home, I humoured him and reported the gossip. I sensed him relax, feeling secure now that the Gryffe was beside him. The creature showed no animosity. I did not move towards Timon, I realized that I had no automatic right to their trust, it had to be earned. Although the Gryffe had no eyelids, I saw the light fading from its eyes. In the depths, something that had been focused on me gradually receded as the creature slept. The Gryffe breathed in a faint, vibrating purr, like a feline.

I was nearest to the fire and I fed it with fuel, dried lumps that could have been dung or vegetation but gave a fragrant smoke. Eventually Timon joined the Gryffe in sleep. When I stood up, the diamond eyes



swivelled and were immediately aware. I knelt down so that I was less threatening and asked softly, "Do you understand me?"

"Yss."

"I love him. I won't hurt him. Let me help you both."

It considered. Then it raised its head. The warmth of the fire had encouraged Timon to unfasten his jacket and padded body-warmer, they fell open as the Gryffe moved. Timon's shirt strained around an incongruously large pot-belly. I slowly reached out a hand and, encouraged by the Gryffe's lack of reaction, eased the shirt-buttons loose.

Timon was so swollen that his navel protruded in a little pink knob, forced out by the internal pressure. His nipples were large and dark, on small round breasts like a girl's. I choked back an exclamation of shock, of horror, and lightly placed my fingers on his belly.

The thing inside him flexed, hardness pushing against my hand. Timon shifted and grunted in his sleep, complaining at the nudging of impatient life inside him. Filled as he was, his own organs must have been compressed and shouldered aside. His hips were narrower than those of a woman, he was surely not built for this task.

How had this happened? The immediate "how" was obvious, by screwing him I had impregnated him, but why was it possible? What kind of being grew inside him?

"Brachis," I whispered aloud, staring into the amused gaze of the Gryffe. "This is the Brachis, a hermaphrodite!" Timon groaned and pulled up one knee, clearly unable to get comfortable in the chair. His swollen abdomen twitched visibly and he came awake.

He pulled a face, seeing me beside him, and looked away. I was trying to decide what to say when he remarked prosaically enough "I'm dying for a piss," and got up. "It squashes my bladder," he said, "Not to mention my gut and my belly. I get awful indigestion." He went out, returning with his clothes fastened modestly around himself again.

I resumed my seat and watched him, unable to stop staring at his middle.

"What the hell are you going to do, Ti?"

"Wait," he said with an attempt at a grin, "What else?"

"For how long? What's going to happen to you? You're dead right about me betraying you, I ought to drag you off to the nearest decent hospital and get that cut out of you."

"But you're not going to," he said quietly. "You haven't betrayed Gryffe and you're not going to betray me – or our offspring." He placed his hands on himself and I realized that he had deliberately avoided touching his body, keeping my attention away from his altered shape. "It can't be too much longer. I conceived over seven months ago, it takes nine in women so I suppose it must be about the same for me. I hope it's early. I feel like I'm going to burst."

"You look like it. How will it get out? You're not made like a woman."

"How do you think? Isn't it rather ironic that the Brachis came into the world the same way as shit?"





For once, I read him correctly. I got up and took him in my arms and held him as he wept, not from weakness but because he had the strength to admit to his fear.



Like most young men of my privileged upbringing, I had thought a lot about sex, very little of reproduction. Pregnancy and childbirth were dark, mysterious affairs, discussed in private by my grandmother, my mother and my aunts. Now and again one of the women would choose to quicken by her man, would grow heavy and ripe, and then amid much feminine bustle and excitement, would produce the latest child somewhere in the secret fortress of my grandmother's rooms. These goings on had nothing to do with my own adventures. If I managed to get inside some pretty girl's knickers, it was for mutual fun. When my sperm and her egg met, they ignored one another. It never occurred to me that one of my girl-friends might take it into her head to swallow the drugs that would allow our bodily fluids to become temporarily compatible and permit conception. If she did, it was her choice, not mine. I had always assumed that I would meet a woman with whom I would bond strongly enough to consider raising a child. It would be a calm, rational decision. She would take a course of medicines and we would make passionate and hopefully productive love.

What had happened? Timon, unknowingly fertile, had not rejected my acid sperm. Perhaps his apparently male body was conditioned not to attack his own, so had accepted mine. I rubbed his back as he leaned against me, trying to make sense of my own troubled feelings. I was in an emotional turmoil and he must have sensed it.

I kept seeing him as a boy, then realizing that he was partly a woman, and the dichotomy made me feel dizzy. I wanted to touch his belly, feel the shape of my unnatural child, I was both terribly curious and yet repelled by what was inside him, the sly, unsuspected workings of his body. Somewhere in him there must be ovaries, or their equivalent. Did he have a feminine womb or was the child lying amid his intestines, perhaps enclosed in just some sort of membrane? Could he eject it unaided when the time came, or would he die in agony because there was no way out, and the trapped thing must tear him apart to free itself from his unintentional embrace?

"You can touch it," he said into my shoulder. I looked down into his damp and reddened face. I knew he was not talking about the Gryffe. "It's half yours anyway."

His belly was packed taut but resilient. I realized that the child was surrounded by fluid, held in more than just thin skin. The head must have been tucked deep inside him and I could only identify the hard curve of its back. When strong limbs kicked against my palm, I could feel the elasticity of Timon's belly as it took the blow. He must have become accustomed to the powerful movement but I was shocked. I had expected to feel something round and soft, a gently twitching lump of stuff, not this great, lively creature squirming around like a fish. Just the thought of

something like this invading my own body made me feel ill. My emotions were complex, contradictory. I wanted to hold him in my arms, protect him, carry him away and hand him over to some professional who could cut the child out of him and sew him up and drug him beyond all pain, and yet at the same time I had a guilty, sweaty-palmed desire to push him to the floor and enter him, here on the dull brown hearth-rug before the fire. His body was ripe, with voluptuous feminine curves grafted onto the elegantly muscled frame of a young man. He was both, a contradiction, a chimera. He reached down, grasping my erect organ before I realized what he was about, and said "Take me to bed, Sven. I need you now." The feel of his slender bones under my hands made me curl up inside.

Timon led me up to his dark room and we undressed in the dim red moonlight. A trick of the light made him seem to glow as if his contents were luminous. The child filled the space between Timon's narrow hips like a great gourd shrink-wrapped in his skin, jutting out to shadow his genitals. When he bent over to pull off his shoes, his ribs pressed down on the top of his abdomen and he grunted with effort.

I wrapped him in the rough blankets and held him, feeling how cold he was, how bony and vulnerable and small. I desired him so much that I ached, but I was not so selfish that I did not realize what damage I could do to him. He really wanted reassurance rather than sex. I cuddled him, caressing his small, tender breasts, and entered him very gently, trying to avoid putting any weight on him. I could feel the wriggling thing inside him as he pressed against me. I had never been so careful of a partner before, or so aware of how easily I could cause hurt. I was so concerned about him that I barely considered my own satisfaction, and that night I had the most erotic experience of my life.



I woke to a moment of disorientation, breathing air that was cold enough to set me coughing and lying in scratchy, slightly damp blankets. Something vibrated nearby and I turned my head.

The Gryffe lay in a great curve across the bed, black and sleek, its chin and both jointed forelegs resting on Timon's domed body. It was purring, its paws kneading gently at his belly through the blankets. Timon's face was slack in sleep, his eyelids flickering as he dreamed. I stared at the Gryffe and the monster stared back, as if defying me to object to its presence. I got out of bed, my toes curling away from the cold tiles on the floor, and began pulling on my clothes. Timon made a small murmuring sound and stretched his arms above his head, then reached down to run his hands down the Gryffe's neck in an almost unconscious caress. I could no longer bear to watch, I went down to the kitchen and looked for something to eat.

I desired to assert some authority, I dearly wanted to rant, to bully Timon into letting me take him home, but I had the sense to see that any such action would be disastrous. Belatedly, I realized that I was as guilty as he, more so if you considered that I was the elder, the heir, the trustworthy one. The family would certainly hold me responsible if the truth came out. I had



committed the greater crime. I could not even persuade him to allow me to fly him to somewhere warmer and more comfortable. I had no choice but to wait, either at home or with him, and how could I bear to go off and leave in ignorance of what might happen to him? Yet remaining held enough misery.

The Gryffe was a child of its species, although a subtle one. Maybe it was all in my imagination, but I felt that it sensed my disquiet and laughed at me behind the obscuring crystal of its gaze. It was utterly confident in its possession of Timon. I had no argument to counter his assertion that the child inside him only grew still, and allowed him to sleep, while the Gryffe purred a lullaby against him. I saw that while the Gryffe was out flying, Timon became fretful and anxious, unable to settle until its return. I sometimes wished that my absence had caused him equal distress. The bond between him and that monster was already far too strong and I did not have the right or the means to break it. I hoped that the Gryffe would soon decide that it was fully fledged and set of in a fruitless search for others of its kind, but I had a nasty feeling that it was more intelligent than that. Besides, it appeared that it was indeed the Gryffe who kept us on the windswept coast, the call of its ancestors was strong there.

Over the next weeks, I found myself doing the chores. It soon became impossible for Timon to disguise his expanding girth under a heavy overcoat and I took over the shopping. He could no longer be bothered to clean the cottage properly or cook meals, I held my tongue and told myself that I had little else to do. In my more reasonable moods, I could see that Timon was very out of sorts. His back ached if he stood for long, the food did not suit his sensitive digestion and he did not sleep well. He was very thin in the face and his eyes looked bruised and haunted. Timon had been forced to hand over control of himself to an alien being and he hated that. He was male enough to resent looking like a breeding female, embarrassed and betrayed by his renegade body. Sometimes he would manage to overcome his resentment, and I my impatience and jealousy, and we would talk long into the night while the Gryffe hunted the cliffs like a malevolent black owl.

Very little was known about the Brachis, rather more about the Gryffe. So much had been destroyed in the conflagration, the bodies had been piled into heaps and burned to ash. Objects of art, science and architecture were all considered to be infected by the tyrants' hands and so followed them into the blaze.

"Quite probably only a small proportion of the Brachis were hermaphrodite," Timon remarked. "And because the female organs are internal, and there's no separate genital opening, there's no reason why hermaphrodites haven't been turning up undetected all along. After all, male homosexuality has always been prohibited!"

"I wonder why?"

He ignored my heavy sarcasm. "The law must have been brought in at the same time as the ruling against the manufacture of glass. I doubt if they realized that Brachis genes were around in the appar-

ently normal population."

"Who said they were? Maybe our family were Brachis all along, or at least sheltered them and interbred with them."

"Could be. Who'd have known? Believe me, Sven, I didn't know!"

"Well I certainly didn't. Didn't you even suspect?"

He shook his head emphatically. "You don't think I chose to go through this, do you?"

"You might have done, not knowing what was involved. You might have thought it was worth the risk. Why did you do it, Ti?"

"I wanted you." He looked at me through his lashes, the old Timon back for a moment, very young and an unconscious flirt. "I could ask you why you responded."

"Because it was mutual and it seemed no harm could come of it. Let's not get bogged down with regrets, shall we? When did you first realize you were – I hesitate to use the word 'pregnant' for a male."

"I'm not entirely male, remember? How about 'gravid'? I didn't realize why I was being sick, I just thought I'd picked up some persistent bug. I didn't connect it with my nipples swelling up and getting sore, the nausea had gone off by then. I just felt odd, different, unsettled. My hormones must have been going wild. Gryffe knew. He kept nuzzling my belly. I thought it was some instinctive behaviour, he'd bonded onto me when he hatched and perhaps it was to persuade me to feed him or groom him, I didn't realize it was something to do with me. Then I could feel something deep in my guts, something twitching and jumping, it had been getting stronger for days, of course it was the child moving around but it felt strange. I looked down and realized my belly was getting fat, tried to suck it in and found this hard lump sitting there in my insides. For a moment I thought I'd got some ghastly tumour, I squeezed it and realized that was where I could feel movement."

"What did you do?"

He pulled a face. "Ran to the toilet and threw up. I didn't realize even then, I thought I'd picked up worms or some other horrible parasitic thing forming a cyst in my gut. I dosed myself with a general vermifuge and spent the next three days trying to turn myself inside out, how anything hung on in there through the cramps I don't know, but it did. When I stopped exploding, I did what I should have done at the start, got myself scanned. They told me there was a clerical error, my scan had obviously become confused with that of a pregnant woman, would I come back for another and an apology, and that was when I left home. Gryffe and I just wandered for a while, we visited sites of Brachis temples." He raised an eyebrow at my self-satisfied nod.

"That's where I began looking for you. Go on."

"There isn't much more. I ignored it for as long as I could. When I looked as if I'd got a beer-gut and I could feel it bouncing around inside me, I rented this place and sat down to wait and see what happened."

"You idiot. You should have told me."

"Why? So I could be cut open and probed and photographed?"

I wriggled uncomfortably. "I could have helped you."



"Perhaps. How much do you know about looking after newborn infants?"

"Probably about as much as you do. I could fly home and fetch someone to help, one of the girls, Mimian or Randa –"

"No!" He pulled himself upright in his chair, glaring at me. "No, I don't want anyone else to know. This is between the two of us, right?"

"Ti, this could kill you. We don't even know if you're a complete hermaphrodite, if you've got the – the equipment to give birth, or if you're old enough to be able to do it. By the size of you, you've got a bloody huge kid in there, there might not even be room for it to get through your pelvis."

"Now you're being unreasonable. The Brachis didn't have sophisticated medical equipment but they survived all that time."

"You don't know how many of them bled to death or died in agony," I said darkly, not realizing that he was trying to convince himself.

"I'll be fine." He tilted his head, listening. "Gryffe and I can handle it. That's him coming home."

I went to open the window. I had heard nothing but sure enough, there was a brief dry flurry of wings and a draught in my face as the Gryffe landed neatly on the sill and stepped in with a nod of acknowledgement. It annoyed me that the monster was polite to me. The Gryffe swung the length of its tail into the room so that I could shut out the rain and darkness, then it hopped down to the floor and walked across to Timon.

"Supper?" I asked, trying to avoid falling back into my usual state of jealous resentment. The Gryffe glanced back at me and ran the tip of its tongue across its lip, answer enough. It was growing fast and always hungry. Timon shook his head.

"I've got indigestion again, make me some spider-leaf tea, will you?"

"I'm sure that stuff isn't good for you, why don't you let me get you something from the druggist in Golarion tomorrow?"

"If you insist."

I fetched supper, a large bowl of chopped meat, bread and boiled carrots for the Gryffe, meat pie for me and a mug of the spiced tea for Timon. He drank it down thirstily but shook his head at an offer of a slice of my pie.

"Come on, eat something. You need to keep your strength up."

"I'm too full."

"You've barely eaten a thing today."

"I'm not hungry, Sven. I'm full of gas and it won't seem to shift either way." He arched his back then pressed a hand to his mouth, eyes wide. I saw his belly start to jump, hauled him to his feet and opened the window just in time. He leaned over the sill and threw up into the shrubbery. He hung there with saliva hanging in strings from his chin, making half-hearted attempts to spew, until it was obvious that he was empty and I dumped him back into his seat by the fire.

"Feeling better?"

"No. I've never had such bad wind, I'm all cramped up." He pulled up his feet, cuddling his aching belly. His face was blotchy and bruised-looking. The Gryffe

met my gaze in inscrutable silence and I knew that we were temporarily in accord. If Timon wanted to believe that my cooking had given him the gripes, we would not force him to face reality just yet.



"Sven?"

I came awake from an uncomfortable doze, sprawled as I was in a chair that was too small and too hard. "Sven." The voice was unfamiliar, sibilant. Something nudged at my arm and I looked around into the extravagantly exotic face of the Gryffe.

"Oh, shit." I looked across at the empty chair. "Where is he?"

I followed the swaying serpentine back and flicking tail, growing more anxious by the second. Timon was sitting on the bed, clutching his middle. There was an empty bottle beside him and a stink of cheap whisky rose from unpleasant puddles on the floor.

"Can't seem to keep anything down," he remarked, trying to sound in command of something, anything, just his own voice perhaps.

"You stupid little brat, what're you trying to do to yourself?"

"The painkillers came back up too. Life's a bitch. Should have tried the booze earlier, I wanted to go into this pissed out of my face." He pulled in a deep breath and held it, then let it out with a puffing gasp. "Didn't think it was going to be quite like this, Sven. I thought it would be a couple of great big fucking cramps and out it would come, like when you get really bad constipation. My belly's tying itself in knots and then tearing itself apart again and nothing's happening. I can't feel anything shifting, I just hurt."

I sat beside him and let him lean in against my chest.

"Where does it hurt?" I asked, as if I knew anything about labour pains.

"All around here."

Everything went hard under my hand, his flesh clenching and tightening until it felt like stone, and he tried to lean over.

"You're going to stay right here while I run and get the flyabout, then I'm taking you to the nearest hospital and I don't care what you –"

My words were drowned out by his groan. He dropped down onto his knees, slipping off the edge of the bed onto the floor. When I lifted him up, his clothes were warm and wet under my hands as if he had pissed himself. For a moment I thought that he was bleeding, but the fluid that dripped onto the floor was clear.

"The membranes have ruptured," he told me, trying so hard to be calm, in control of his own wayward body. "Probably won't be long. Don't leave me alone. Sven, please." Now he was pleading, terrified, a small boy again. "It hurts so much. Don't leave me, please don't leave me!"

"I won't." I picked him up and put him back onto the bed and sat with him through the longest night of our lives.

It was a battle inside him, the Brachis child against a body too slight and immature to expel it easily. In the end, he opened up, screaming in agony as his muscles



stretched too far and delicate membranes ruptured. The tight rose unfurled, revealing first the top of a dark head, bulging wider and wider until I could grasp the hard round skull, support it as he convulsed to expel the shoulders, then catch the slippery blood-streaked body as it came free. The Gryffe fizzled with excitement and spread its wings, dancing from foot to foot. Timon lay in a heap, breathing harshly, his head turned away. I stared down into the indignant red face of our son.

"Timon, it's a boy!"

He ignored me, holding his belly, then he gave a grunt and pulled up his knees, pushing out a dark, raw-liver coloured mass that must have been the placenta. The baby struggled briefly and the Gryffe leaned past me and before I realized what it was doing, used the tip of its tongue to clear the mucus from the baby's mouth. The small chest expanded and gave the birth-cry, high as the yowl of a cat, but clear and powerful.

The Gryffe never appeared at a loss for a moment. It nosed at the child then with a sharp click of jaws, bit through the umbilical cord. The lack of hygiene did concern me but since I had no idea how to go about this myself, I could hardly complain.

There was a hell of a mess and the hot-metal odour of fresh blood. I stank of my own sweat. I wanted a hot bath, a hot drink, ten hours of sleep and someone else to clear everything away.

"Give him to me." Timon sounded, and looked, half conscious and near to tears.

"Yes, sure." I handed the child over with an inexplicable apprehension. Timon supported him in his arms as if he had been used to holding new-born infants all his life, staring down into the screwed-up little face. The Gryffe hissed softly, watching the baby with an expression that I interpreted as satisfaction. I busied myself finding clean towels and sheets, by the time I got as far as changing the soiled laundry, the baby was suckling at Timon's breast and he was lying back on the pillows in an exhausted doze. I got myself a beer.

When I wandered back into the bedroom, I found a charming little domestic scene that filled me with disquiet. Timon lay on his back asleep, only his still-inflated stomach and his reddened, rounded breasts showing that there was anything unusual about him. The Gryffe curled up beside him with its nose tucked under its tail, eyes sparkling as it watched the baby safely contained within the ebony ring of its body. It purred gently, a sound as steady and rhythmical as a distant ocean. The baby slept as though he lay in a crib or his father's arms.



I put Timon on a course of antibiotics and anti-inflammatories and he healed fast. The baby was not demanding. As long as he was fed at frequent intervals and his nappy changed, he was content to sleep, lulled by the Gryffe's rough purr, the sound that had soothed him even while he was nested in Timon's body. Timon trusted the monster implicitly. I would rather have left a child with a half-tamed dogbear but I bit my tongue and kept my fears to myself.

I had never felt so protective of a small child before.

His pink vulnerability, the perfection of tiny hands and feet and eyes, all meant more to me because he was of my own flesh, doubly so since my father was also Timon's. I wondered how potent the Brachis strain was in him, whether he carried the taint so strongly that the Gryffe could detect it even at this early age.

"What are you going to name him?" I asked Timon. He was feeding the baby, both of them in a kind of milky doze as nourishment passed from one to the other. At times like that, I could see the female in Timon very clearly, read it in the tilt of his head, his soft breathing and his sure hand supporting the baby's skull, even more than in the obvious shape of his breasts. I wondered why no one had suspected, why I had not recognized his latent femininity earlier.

"Giorgius."

I hid my shock well. "It's a good name but doesn't it have uncomfortable historical connotations?"

"Someone with that name led the insurrection that wiped out the Gryffe and drove the Brachis underground for a thousand years," he agreed. "So wouldn't it be nicely ironic if a Giorgius brought them back?"

"The Blessed Giorgius on his white horse and his merry imps with their sacks of gifts wasn't a historical reality, that's all prettied up for children. The real Giorgius was probably some pissed-off slave-master or minor noble who took the chance to stab a Brachis in the back while he was on the job, then set the slaves loose to cause enough confusion to allow him to escape capture. He inadvertently started a war, people followed his lead because they had nothing left to lose, not because he was a hero. As for all the stories of him finding his sword hidden in a dead hero's tomb and leading troops into battle against impossible odds and shooting Gryffe out of the sky and rescuing virgin princesses chained to rocks —! That's what mythology is all about."

"Very likely," Timon replied, refusing to be provoked. "But I always wanted to name a son of mine Giorgius."

Who was I to argue? I hadn't hauled young Giorgius around inside me for nine months, I supposed that Timon had the right to call him anything he wanted.

Timon gave me a month in which to get to know my son. I have never decided whether he was compassionate or cruel. He was too exhausted and hurt to leave immediately but he could have gone any time after the first week without harm to either himself or the child. I came back from a shopping trip to Golarion and before I laid a hand on the latch of the door, I knew. A presence had gone from the cottage like a snail sucked from its shell. Neither Timon nor Giorgius could fill a dwelling with such a sense of life, or leave it so empty when they withdrew. The Gryffe had flown and taken his two acolytes with him. I cursed myself and them, rushed back to the flier and circled the area, but of course Timon had a few hours' start on me and he would have expected me to try to follow. This time, he left no clue, no hint of his intentions.

I came back to the cottage, defeated and miserable, to pack my clothes and search for anything my brother might have left behind. In the kitchen, discarded in the bin with the vegetable peelings and stale crusts, so that



I almost missed them, were the shards of a large, pale blue-green egg. Its membranes were still sticky and damp. I realized why the Gryffe had stayed and I knew why it had flown. The worst of it was that Timon had not told me, had not had confidence in me even after all I had done to earn his trust. He would not be naive enough to visit the sites of Brachis temples again, but he did not need to. His Gryffe was no longer alone. I went cold to the core. If the Gryffe were anything like scavvies, any member of the hive was capable of breeding. Scavvy workers were kept in submissive non-breeding status simply by the presence of a breeding queen, whose hormonal secretions prevented eggs from developing in their ovaries. At the death of the queen, the next most dominant scavvy would begin to lay. Technically any scavvy was able to mate with any other, all bore vestigial testes and ovaries. These ripened only if the hormone levels dropped in the hive, in the absence of the dominant queen or its partner. The Gryffe had found its mate and once both were mature, nothing would stop them breeding. As for the Brachis, Timon certainly knew what to do if he wanted to found a dynasty. No doubt he would not wish me to father the next fruit of his womb, our line was inbred enough already. The Gryffe and the Brachis were back and there was nothing I could do.



**Sylvia M. Siddall** has previously contributed five stories to *Interzone*: "Kingfisher" (#30), "Thylacine, Thylacine" (#44), "The Perils of Unprotected Sex" (#84), "Housewife" (#92) and "Written in the Flesh" (#95). She lives with her family near Wellingborough, Northamptonshire.

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## Rewriting History

Gwyneth Jones

Apparently the term “cyber” has been officially demoted from buzzword status. Cool people are humiliated to be seen going into “cybercafés”, supermodels are refusing to wear mirrorshades: the ageing prefix is death to all pretensions of style. I read this in a (broadsheet, printed paper) news journal the other day so it must be true. I suspect the pundits will have no better luck than the cyberpunks themselves (who announced this death long ago). No one can hurry the decline of a popular obsession. These things linger and fade in their own sweet time, like those standing waves on the motorways where you can run into the ghostly tailback of some dreadful gridlock anything up to a week later. In proof of which here comes a fat new cyber anthology, with a “Lawnmower Man” cover proudly featuring a bunch of style-names, and a pair of those old-time bald, glossy raw-meat mannikins in close and athletic embrace.

But that’s the bad news. *Cybersex* edited Richard Glyn Jones (Raven, £6.99), allegedly devoted to the activity Pat Cadigan refers to as “dirty typing,” is really a good solid collection of science-fiction stories about sex, dating from 1966 to the present day. All but one of them are reprints (Storm Constantine, mysteriously, provides the only original entry). There are the inevitable scraps of nothing gleaned on the cheap from Buzz Names, in this case from Will Self, Martin Amis, Jeff Noon, but the rest is fine. Many classics, old and new, are included: “Catman” by Harlan Ellison, with the legendary machine-fuck scene; “The Girl Who Was Plugged In” by James Tiptree, Jr, with its sad dissection of the commercial power of “femininity”; “Love and Sex Among the Invertebrates,” Pat Murphy’s weird post-human love song; Connie Willis’s controversial “All My Darling Daughters.”

There are a number of sexual-revolution tales in sf settings, where the horrendous family life of the US in the 1950s hangs like a spectre in the bed-curtains. Genuine virtual sex, as in text or avatar-mediated shenanigans in the digital world, is covered in “Bots: A Love Story And A Dream” by Michael Hemmington, Maureen McHugh’s “A Coney Island Of The Mind,” L. Timmel Duchamp’s “Bettina’s Bet” and Candace Jane Dorsey’s “(Learning About) Machine Sex” – in my opinion still the best of its breed. McHugh’s sly tale of mistaken identity is I think already a classic. “Bettina’s Bet” is not a great piece of writing, but like the desperately derivative “Bots” it’s truthful and interesting about this contemporary phenomenon, the make-believe for adults that turns all its users, before they know it – before they feel any warning guilt or fear – into that despicable singles-bar

liar who has a different life story and persona for every attempt to score. It’s odd that there isn’t a Pat Cadigan story here, and that there’s nothing from William Gibson himself. Presumably they were too expensive even in reprint. But it’s okay. Second generation is not *less*, in the virtual world. Imitation, one way or another, is exactly what this “cyber” stuff is about.

The introduction to *Cybersex* gives the impression that the editor’s original plan was to sell futuristic sex as a species of designer lager. He seems bemused by the actual content of the stories, wistfully citing one short passage in “Catman” (not the computer meld bit!) as being *actually arousing*... It’s true that there’s very little of what you might call effective porn here. Even Rudy Rucker’s imipolex wank-fest “Randy Karl Tucker” (for Pynchon fans everywhere) is too transparently alienated: the American white male sex-tourist, searching the globe for a *really* docile female-shaped object. But that’s sf for you. Maybe all stories about sex have to be stories about power gradients. Science-fiction sex certainly tends to treat romance as a kind of technology, and “eroticism” rarely gets in the way of the nuts and bolts of ideology and argument.

Melissa Scott’s *Night Sky Mine* (Tor, \$24.95) is set in a society that might be regarded as sexually revolutionary, even shocking, in some quarters: a cosmopolitan, complex, urban scene where female autonomy, same-sex relationships, group marriage, strange brands of parentage are accepted as normal. But though the main characters include a male married couple and a pair of young girls hovering on the brink of sexual romance, sex has even less than usual

to do with the plot. This concerns a mysterious series of “pirate” attacks on deep-space asteroid mining rigs; and a parallel story of strange developments in the wild virtual world that exists alongside the digital infrastructure of human life. *Night Sky Mine* is the name of one of the companies whose crews have been attacked. The male couple, Tarasov a “Technical Squad” cop whose job is policing the dataworld, and a cyborg-enhanced spacefarer called Rangsey, are enlisted to do a covert investigation. Meanwhile a young girl called Ista, who was found abandoned on one of the ravaged mining rigs as a baby, works as an apprentice to a sort of virtual-world game dealer. The formidable Trindade harvests wild flora and fauna from the data-world – software entities that have escaped and naturalized, or evolved autonomously in the digital soup, perceived as animals or plants as a helpful metaphor – and assesses doubtful programs bought from other such dealers. Trindade claims she is herself a responsible operator, but tells Ista horror stories of the killer viruses that can piggyback on captured wildlife and run amuck in human digital space; about the terrible data-monster called the *demogorgon*, and what might happen if it came aware.

Melissa Scott deals in an Urban Bohemia of the future that’s been around at least since the days of early Delany: where an artificial environment has grown, or evolved, to a degree of complexity that mimics nature (rather like the data world in *Night Sky Mine*). Fringe and counter-cultural communities can survive and even thrive in the chinks of the vast space machine although (to make life interesting) real power remains in the hands of the middle-class straights – a term that still seems appropriate, though in Scott’s worlds sexual orientation isn’t supposed to be a big issue. *Night Sky Mine*’s complex society is well-realized: the colourful New Agey “Travellers,” the Union cyborgs, the WASP analogue middle classes; all the gradations of class and poverty in the smelly, gaudy, space-habitat *souk*. And Ista, with her awkward and very real adolescent relationships, gives the book a fresh, young-adult feel that didn’t detract from my enjoyment. However I did feel, as I have not felt in other Melissa Scott novels, that the social intricacies swamped the plot. Though the parallel stories do sort-of come together in the end I would have happily traded some loss of detail for a better focus on the broad outline.

I haven’t read the first episode of Harry Harrison and John Holm’s (aka Tom Shippey’s) alternate-history epic *The Hammer and the Cross*; but I read the second episode, *One King’s Way* (Legend, £5.99), and enjoyed it.





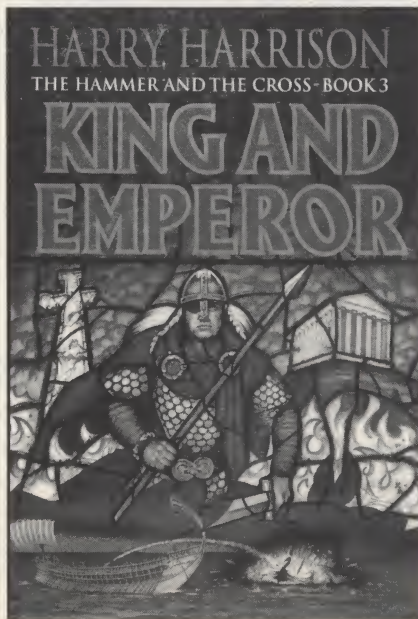
It's a hero tale of the simplest kind. The central character, Shef, ex-slave risen to be King of the North, is the Chosen One. He has adventures, all of which end improbably well; thus confirming his Chosen One status. But the Scandinavian setting (when we get there, it's a bit dull beforehand) is novel and attractive, and from the moment Shef finds the Spear of Longinus in a troll's smoke-house, it's one great Indiana Jones sleigh-ride all the way home. (That's the spear used by the centurion who pierced Christ's side on the cross, by the way, and became an early Christian convert through his supposed comment "Truly this was the son of God" or some such; the same spear later to feature in the Fisher King cycle of the Grail epic, which you may remember from the version set in Manhattan where Robin Williams plays a cute homeless person...)

But I'm afraid the third episode, *King and Emperor* (Tor \$24.95; Legend, £16.99), is no fun. In *One King's Way* the Chosen One was having exciting problems, and could masquerade as an object of interest and sympathy. In *King and Emperor* Shef, securely established as king, decides for no good reason to embark on a campaign against the (accelerated) Holy Roman Empire and heads off for the Mediterranean. In more sympathetic hands this could have been a tragic elegy: the story of the Chosen One who tempts fate once too often, a tragic account of the downfall of a Dark Ages Alexander. Instead the alternate-history thesis appears in dire nakedness: to wit, how much better all round it would have been if Alfred the Great had been a stay-at-home wimp, and a Norseman with one eye, who was actually a go-getting technology-sponsoring US-of-A-style entrepreneur, had taken over in England and ended up running North West Europe.

All sf writers plunder the archives, me included: but this isn't a story, it's a party political broadcast. I am not so worried about the Yankee at the Court of King Charlemagne aspect, whereby Shef's boffins effortlessly invent ironclads, hang-gliders and a slew of other anachronistic gadgets (but forget to invent signal flags for their naval warfare, shame). But I resent the suggestion that it is *brave and unusual* for a state ruler to be keen on financing innovations in military technology, instead of getting war over with as fast as possible and devoting himself to boring, cissy things like common law and scholarship. I could also get snuffy about the way Shef's creators, after smugly dissing the White Christ for 900-odd pages, still contrive to load their own hero with a bizarre panoply of New Testament stigmata – just in case there's something in it, I suppose.

I'm not apportioning blame. I don't know which of the authors wrote or designed the bits I liked or the bits I didn't like. (Predictably, alas, the fictional treatment of women manages to be *much worse* than the coverage we get in the actual Dark Ages records). I can only hope, faintly, that readers will be inspired to investigate the sources, and find out about the intensely interesting and moving "real" history (which is of course already a kind of fiction) behind the fake.

The literal-minded alternate historian has to plunder reality for material – awarding the exploits and qualities of historical characters to their fictional substitutes, rearranging all the real events, religious movements, political configurations. Phillip Mann has no such problems with his epic tale of Roman Britain in 1993 (*sic*, the cover copy), *A Land Fit For Heroes*. In this story nothing has to make historical sense, and though I hope and believe Phillip Mann was in no way responsible for that daft date on the cover of Volume Three, pretty well anything goes. There are distinct signs of Mann's own Antipodean background in the continual brewings of billys (yes, billys) of tea in the Wild British Woods; and in a splendid poolside barbie for the high-ups.



In this case I read Volume Three (*The Dragon Wakes*; Vista, £4.99), found it tedious and would not have considered pursuing Volume Four except that I was supposed to review it for this column. But *The Burning Forest* (Gollancz, £16.99) was a pleasant surprise. It is not reasonable to suppose that late-21st century rich Romans (I think that should be about 2746 AUC, shouldn't it?) would behave like Romans of the early Empire in a children's-library information book, eating the same peculiarly elaborate food and even dressing the same way. It is not reasonable to have Europe (including Britain) laced with maglev superhighways, etc, and yet have the inhabitants of the native forests of this offshore island – established Roman territory for 2,000 years! – untouched and resisting like natives of Papua New Guinea (on this timeline) fighting the might of Oz. But this is one of those books where the parts are more than the sum of the whole.

The plot is about a mad Roman Emperor (of course, we know about *those*) who is determined to burn off the whole of the British Wild Wood, in order to farm sheep here instead. He's fond of sheep; I don't suppose I need tell you why. He knows this is an incredibly wasteful and ridiculous way to deal with all that valuable timber; he just likes the idea. I have to admit that I became very puzzled, and mostly found no clues in my two episodes to explain why the characters who were not supposed to be crazy behaved the way they did. I really cannot tell you why Miranda the elemental divinity responded to the Emperor's evil plan by turning the whole of northern mainland Britain into a black glass desert, before turning herself into a – cosmic egg, was it? But the dialogue is human, quirky and appealing, and the fantasy is at least determinedly odd, in an elderly sort of way. I don't know what the first two volumes are like, but this one grows on you.

Which brings me to *The Book of Shadows*, first in "The Nightshade Chronicles" (Point Fantasy, £3.99). It's a kiddies' sword-and-sorcery thing, by Stan Nicholls. It's perfectly harmless, and more humane than some. I read the part where the disgusting sea monsters climb aboard the *Windrunner* to attack our hero and his companions (Shani the knife thrower [obligatory feisty girl] and Meath the dodgy mercenary), to my eight-year-old. He was favourably impressed. Only one problem. Bright eleven-year-olds are already only too willing to churn this sort of stuff out by the yard. Please, they don't need any more encouragement.

Gwyneth Jones





## High Alpha-Minus

Chris Gilmore

In some historical fiction the touches of period colour appear just too suddenly, are applied with just too broad a brush, smell just a little too much of the lamp and thus become counter-productive. I'm always sorry to note this, as I know in my bones that the writer has done his best and is pleased with the outcome; he will never be convinced that his efforts dispel the illusion they intended to reinforce. Conversely, with some contemporary fiction the writer anchors his tale with so many topical references to the most ephemeral aspects of pop culture that one feels he has already dismissed his own book as a one-edition wonder, and chosen to sacrifice staying-power on the altar of immediacy. No doubt that is simple realism nine times in ten, but my heart lies with those who compete for immortality under the aspect of eternity.

John Buxton's *The Wishing Tree* (Orion, £15.99) exemplifies that tendency, and I think he underrates himself. The story is of the child-corrupted-by-supernatural-entity type, but as the first corpse appears early on it's effectively combined with the police procedural. Eleven-year-old Marcus Waters is the last person to speak to a young girl before she's raped and murdered in a nearby arm of Epping Forest. Sergeant Willis, who spearheads the investigation, quickly realizes that Marcus is hiding something, though he can hardly be the perpetrator. Willis is attracted to Marcus's divorced mother, Caroline, and as more sinister events take place the action escalates through their alternating viewpoints. Buxton evokes the cliché of the honest cop, suspended for not toeing the line, still carrying on his own unsanctioned investigation, but the book is constructed soundly enough to carry even that.

The basic idea has a long ancestry. Jerome Bixby's "It's a Good Life," Ursula Le Guin's *The Lathe of Heaven*, W. W. Jacobs's "The Monkey's Paw," are distinguished examples from this century, and while other times have laid less emphasis on the question of ramified guilt, the fear that one might accidentally invite incursions from another world which neither comprehends nor heeds our morality is a constant factor. As Buxton presents the atmosphere of hysteria gradually mounting to a grisly climax he demonstrates a fine eye for detail. His dialogue is believable too, though he somewhat overdoes both; some detail in the early chapters serves the development of neither character nor atmosphere, and some of the dialogue extends the naturalistic into humdrum, impeding the action without compensating graces. Indeed, parts read like a text pre-

pared for future deconstructionists. For those who enjoy such things, the iconography of suburban class-distinction is presented in all its loathsome nicety as it arises from Buxton's vision of evil, which is intimately linked to his claustrophobic vision of middle-class English life at its most secretive. As Willis remarks, "It's almost as if there are people who know and who aren't telling, and people who half-know but don't quite believe."

Reading on, it seemed less like an original book than the novelization of a melodramatic but well-plotted film or TV mini-series, except that I've never met one so good. Buxton's two principals are exceptionally well observed, and strong enough to sup-

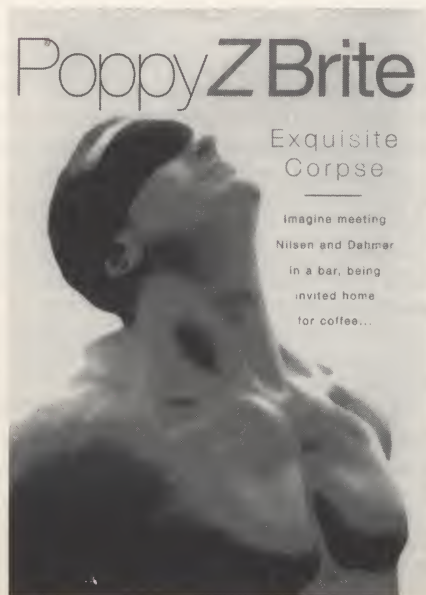
port some deft ornamentation. The point where a young mother, in deep grief and deeper shock at the funeral of her only child, cannot avoid noticing that she's an absolute knockout in black, is especially well done. Yet all the little details which Buxton recounts in words would work so much better visually, brought out by a combination of attentive set-dressing and delicate camera-work – so who's going to make this high Alpha-minus novel into a classic film?

Poppy Z. Brite's *Exquisite Corpse* (Orion, £16.99) is billed as a love story between Jay and Andrew, two homosexual serial killers in the Nilsen/Dahmer tradition, but most of it reads more like a series of portraits from gay life. Apart from the principals there are Tran, a sensitive young Vietnamese drug-dealer; Luke, his former lover who has AIDS, and who once tried to inject Tran with some of his blood; Luke's partners on Radio WHIV, a pirate station devoted to a mixture of rant against the "breeders" who control an unsympathetic "heterocentric" world, interspersed with pop, rock and jazz; and sundry victims. The lovers don't meet until the book is half over, and the sections from Andrew's viewpoint are told in the first person, those from everyone else's in the third, further heightening the impression of two books rather ineptly yoked together.

The same ineptitude affects the only fantasy element. Five years into a life sentence, Andrew acquires (with no rationale whatever) the ability to feign death well enough to fool a prison doctor. His breath and heartbeat cease, his temperature drops to ambient, yet he remains fully conscious and can spring to his feet and murder two doctors in the dissecting room. From there he makes it with little difficulty (and only one more murder) to New Orleans and the love of his life.

On the other hand, very little else is inept. Brite has a superb eye for detail, and is particularly good at visualizing action (especially murder) in confined space, such as a public lavatory. The characters are extreme but, given Brite's assumptions, horribly believable. In making credible people of her cannibal/torturer lovebirds she has brought off a prodigious feat of imagination, and her evocation of atmosphere (especially that of the gay scene in New Orleans) feels wonderfully authentic, though for all I know she may have run it up from whole cloth.

All this ignores the question of who is supposed to buy the book and enjoy it. Speaking purely for myself, much as I admire her descriptive skill I find the many accounts of algolagnia deeply distasteful; nor do I warm to







the droll tableaux which can be assembled from bits and pieces of recently deceased young men, however economical and passionate the descriptive style. Were I gay myself I would probably find the many detailed descriptions of buggery stimulating; on the other hand, were I a campaigner for gay rights I would surely take offence at the fundamental assumptions about gay life.

Indeed, I can see this book making potent ammunition for the homophobic lobby. "Note," they might say, "the extreme emphasis on the physical and total neglect of the spiritual in all the relationships described. Note the double standards which prevail, as promiscuity runs hand-in-glove with possessiveness. Note the habitual use of recreational drugs by all parties, indicating a need to seek refuge from their own selves. Note most of all the wholesale slaughter that ineluctably springs from such a choice of lifestyle" – and so forth, by the yard; no talent required.

Perhaps that was Brite's intention. As a reviewer I am not much concerned with intentionalism, which I regard as the province of literary historians, but I do like to specify likely markets; and it seems to me that unless you're a snobbish male homosexual with a strong inclination towards offences against the person you're unlikely to achieve the fullest possible rapport with *Exquisite Corpse*, for all that the writing is first-rate throughout. "Theirs for their style I'll read, his for his love." In your dreams, Bill.

By one of those interesting coincidences, the next offering, Rachel Pollack's *Godmother Night* (St Martin's, \$24.95; Abacus, £9.99), is also a homosexual love story, but the atmosphere could hardly be more different.

It's a commonplace that all art is ultimately didactic, and literature gets there quicker than most; even so, from *The Well of Loneliness* onwards, lesbian writing has been plagued by didacticism like no other, for the obvious reason that while lesbians have never suffered the same legal persecution as their male counterparts, they have been figures of fun and porn since European culture belatedly rediscovered their existence. Pollack's message is insistent but unexceptionable: your culture, religion, intellect and other human qualities are whatever they may be; your sexuality is something else; and there is no rational reason why any set of the first should be dissonant with any predilection within the second. Who could possibly quarrel with that?

Hoping, I presume, to reassure those who may yet regard all lesbians as monsters of fiendish ingenuity and

perverted lust, Pollack has chosen for her heroines two young women of mind-numbingly banal personality. Jaqueline (or Jaque, as she prefers to be called) is a college freshman (though what she is reading is never indicated). Her parents are a *Saturday Evening Post* couple apparently in suspended animation since 1955, and she has absorbed all their values except those relating to connubial bliss. Laurie is a Brilliant Student in her senior year, already accepted to do post-graduate work in – Guess! Medieval French music? Analysis of polynomial fractal equations? Synergistic Toxicology? No! The ultimate intellectual accolade – Women's Studies!

Just plain folks, you might say, and there's the rub – the lives and loves of the *lumpen-culturati* offer thin substance for a full-length novel. Realizing that an endless succession of such sentences as "I love you," she said, and took a half step into the garden of her lover's arms," are less than adequate to sustain interest for over 300 pages (your basic Mills & Boon runs to fewer than 50,000 words), Pollack introduces an element of the supernatural. But before that she demonstrates her sense of humour: a character suggests that all lesbians should foregather at Lesbos, claiming citizens' rights under the Law of Return; she later refers to Peter and Catherine of Russia as "the two great Greats."

To be fair the book picks up once the dreariness of Women's Studies exceeds even Laurie's threshold and the fantasy aspect gets going. Jaque appears to enjoy the supernatural soliciting of Mother Night, an aspect of Death itself, who leads her into realms of allegory which Pollack describes with some skill, but it doesn't last. Jaque decides to get pregnant, according to strict eugenic principles and by AID (natch), so we get interminable passages from Laurie's viewpoint about the tribulations of a Lesbian Mom on a Low Income.

The book is nearly two-thirds over when the point emerges. Mother Night bumps Jaque off and undertakes the role of godmother to Kate, her daughter. Posing as an imaginary companion she takes her on exciting trips to the land of the dead, which Kate naturally finds preferable to her

claustrophobic existence with the ultra-conformist Laurie, and which leads to an interesting variant on the Faustian bargain. Good, but far too late – it's difficult to imagine who will have read so far. While most of the book seems to celebrate the principals' humourless self-absorption, once Kate's viewpoint gets going there are just enough sly digs at the po-faced earnestness of it all to enrage the right-on sisters.

Back in 1940 L. Ron Hubbard wrote what I regard as his best work: in *Typewriter in the Sky* a pianist finds himself living in a godawful historical romance which is the ongoing project of an ignorant hack writer, for no better reason than that the hack has used his face when visualizing his romantic villain. The theme of people becoming trapped in their own or other people's books has been revived often enough since, but with *My Hero* (Orbit, £15.99) Tom Holt extends it considerably and applies a set of cod rules of composition (called "Basic Authorship Theory") which might loosely be called the rationale for a jolly romp through large numbers of familiar books and even more familiar literary clichés.

Regalian works as the hero of a sword-&-sorcery series, which is a good steady job but somewhat at odds with his blokeish lifestyle when Jane Armitage, his authoress, is off duty. Skinner, who also has no first name, has been trapped in one of his own westerns since 1959 and wants out. Hamlet has been played to packed houses for the last four centuries, and craves variety – but is less than enamoured of the part he lands when he makes it into what Holt whimsically calls Real Life.

The complex mish-mash whereby Holt brings this trio together (plus Jane and Queen Titania, whom they pick up on the way) suggests that the boundary between fiction and reality is not administered as efficiently as it might be. There are strong echoes of Robert Rankin and Douglas Adams, with even a touch of Grant Naylor (I swear the talking gun was a toaster when last we met), but Holt can stand the comparison at every level bar one: *My Hero* is a superb dollop of froth, but (perhaps through over-enthusiastic application of the Theory) he has achieved a plot which is as near as dammit infinitely discontinuous at all points. While a humorous work exists for the sake of its jokes, *My Hero* does so a little too nakedly for me; the jokes are generally good – some are very good indeed – but the effect is so like reading while very drunk that it's disorienting to put the book down and find you've been sober all along.

Chris Gilmore





## From Folk Collectors to Anoraks

Ken Brown

So I wake up in the morning and the radio is going on about whether it's right or wrong to abort one of twins, and telling me that Bill Clinton has just signed a bill which is the "last nail in the coffin of the New Deal." I don't know the details of welfare law in this country, never mind a quarter of the world away in the USA, but as I pick up *Starlight 1*, an original anthology edited by Patrick Nielsen Hayden (Tor, \$24.95), and start reading the introduction, which refers and defers to previous original anthologies – Pohl's *Star Science Fiction*, Knight's *Orbit*, Silverberg's *New Dimensions*, Carr's *Universe* – I can't get the thought of the New Deal out of my mind and start imagining sf editors as sort of post-war versions of the state-sponsored folklore collectors of the 1930s, well-meaning liberal types from New York or Austin (or Brighton) wandering the Appalachians of the literary landscape in search of bits of post-modern culture to preserve.

When approached in that mood the first story in the collection, Michael Swanwick's "The Dead," a brief horrific tale of business life-style, war crimes and scientific corruption set in the near future, seems to be more about the labour theory of value than about bio-engineering. It also seems polemical, leaving me sitting up in bed listening to the morning news thinking "Something must be done" and "They can never get away with it" – but, of course, they *are* getting away with it and none of us can agree on what must be done.

The next story in the book, "Liza and the Crazy Water Man" by Andy Duncan, turns out to be just exactly about a folk-song collector in the 1930s, and about the poverty as well, putting an old and simple idea in a new way. About half-way through reading this story I realize that I am about to enjoy this anthology very much indeed. It didn't disappoint me – although perhaps "enjoy" is the wrong word for an anthology that is never very far from the stories we know, or think we know of Auschwitz, Bosnia or Rwanda.

We set out on a tour of some of the hollows and headlands of these story-worlds of ours. Robert Reed shows us another atrocity of bio-engineering, Susanna Clarke does something mildly confusing with 18th-century magicians and Jane Yolen gets Emily Dickinson abducted by aliens. Gregory Feeley's "Weighing the Ayre" is literally "science fiction," a readable story about science and scientists and military atrocity set in the 17th century that makes use of little or nothing that wasn't known at the time and almost reads like a passage from a recent John Crowley story-within-a-story (and that is as large a compli-

ment as I could pay to any piece of fiction). It's as good a short historical story as I've read in a long time, but never far from the concerns and obsessions of our century.

Susan Palwick provides an item that could easily live outside the sf world, Martha Soukup has a tale of salarymen (or women) that was apparently originally meant for a Neil Gaiman "Sandman" story, and then Carter Scholz brings us up short with "Mengele's Jew" (by analogy with Schrodinger's Cat) another fiction about scientists and atrocity that starts with Heisenberg and follows Mengele through to the end of his life, perfecting the apparatus for an evil experiment and waiting for a different kind of story collector. In a piece of inspired editing that leads straight to the stand-out story of this book, "Erase/Record/Play: A Drama for Print" by John M. Ford. In the near future, in a place not unlike North America, after the Liberation, an interviewer (reporter? UN investigator? psychologist? anthropologist? – we are never told) is trying to make sense of the accounts of a group of survivors from a very strange death camp. He's made to sit through a performance of *Midsummer Night's Dream* which is at the same time group therapy and a war-crimes trial. A story to re-read.

Mark Kreighbaum's "I Remember Angels" maps another district in the same territory, the investigators or collectors, who this time might be aliens, trying to find the truth about some event in the narrator's past, piecing together the lost history of Earth. And we end amongst anthropologists. "The Cost to be Wise" by

Maureen F. McHugh is set in what anyone who read the right kind of books as a child will instantly suss as re-contact with a lost colony that has reverted to unscientific barbarism. And there are teachers and anthropologists and folklore collectors; and an atrocity and investigators and a deadly sharp separation. Like everything else by her that I've seen, it's well done.

But then, while I was reading, the radio started telling me that someone had found a microfossil supposedly from Mars. So everything changed. And I'll remember the day I read this book and wrote this review for a long time. Which is fine, for it's a very good book, and one of the few anthologies I've read recently that seems to have a theme (in fact two or three) and at the same time provides space for a vast variety of writing. I'm already looking forward to *Starlight 2*.

In *The Other End of Time* by Fred-  
Erik Pohl (Tor, \$23.95) evidence of alien life comes through the traditional sf medium of radio signals from space, followed a few years later by a comet-like object that emits gamma rays and appears to decelerate as it approaches the sun. (Strange that no one susses it for a spaceship on about page 46; they obviously didn't read the right books when they were young. If I heard of one of those I'd probably be dancing in the streets – or else digging my bunker, depending on the mood I was in at the time.)

This is a genuinely mainline hard-sf book, so much in the centre of the tradition that it's almost a parody in parts. The rich, mad scientist is a few years dead but his beautiful niece has taken over the lab and is trying to revitalize their private spaceship to go and meet the aliens. And there is an omniscient FBI agent with a heart and an ancient Russian crone, the Baba Yaga of astrophysics who remembers what it used to be like when governments used to fund space programmes. These, and an assortment of multicultural characters with shady pasts, all end up together at the mercy of some aliens who are attempting to collect examples of all intelligent species to bring about the "Eschaton," the Omega Point at the end of the universe when all who have died will be made alive again. Except of course that there are other alien powers who say that the first lot are fighting against the Eschaton and only they can save the universe.

The whole thing becomes a little incoherent after this, perhaps deliberately because the party is kept in almost total ignorance about what is going on for the middle third of the action and spends the last third desperately fighting for their lives in a world at least partly populated by



copies of themselves made by the same tachyon transmitter that got them there in the first place. I think we've been here before, but it's great fun and I hope Pohl keeps it up. There is ample space for a sequel.

And finally a couple of books that are only peripherally sf. **Black Holes: A Traveller's Guide** by Clifford A. Pickover (Wiley, £19.99) was a slight disappointment. The author describes it as "a resource for science-fiction writers, a playground for computer hobbyists, and an adventure and education for beginning physics and astronomy students." It's written as a long (and rather embarrassingly sexist – I assume it is meant to be humorous) conversation between a human space-captain with an obsession with black holes and a tough diamond-covered alien space traveller capable of withstanding large temperatures and accelerations.

When I read the book I was involved in an on-line discussion about black holes and I realized that there were some pretty basic things I didn't know about the theories. I was looking forward to learning more from the book, and I didn't. Not because the book doesn't discuss the things I was interested in – it does – but because, despite the equations and computer programs I still wasn't sure exactly what it was saying about some of the subjects. For example there are some places where I was left confused about what happens at the event horizon, the ergosphere (is that the same as the event horizon? – this book doesn't say), something that Pickover calls "the inner event horizon" or the supposed singularity at the centre.

I'm afraid I found the style just a little too journalistic and chatty for me and the pictures, although pretty, weren't really relevant. In fact they got in the way. Perhaps I'm just the wrong reader for this book. I could have done with more words, fewer pictures and about the same number of equations, but with more explanation for us innumeratees. Three or four of the chapters aren't actually about black holes at all. There are plenty of fine books that deal with computer visualization of fractals and cellular automata. Clifford Pickover wrote some of them. I got the impression that he – or his publisher – might have been recycling old material to pad the book out.

And I am really, really pissed off at the stupid American plethora of units used in the book. Why to they do this? What is the point of measuring the mass of a black hole in solar masses and its circumference in feet? Angular diameter of the apparent star disc in inches drawn on a piece of paper held a foot from your eye? The gravi-

tational constant in kilometres per second per solar mass in one place and dyne-centimetres squared per gram squared in another? Of quoting Planck's Constant in erg-seconds? All in the same book! I half expected to bump into a foot-poundal somewhere. I think I must be the wrong reader for this book.

**A History of the Universe** by Lance Parkin (Virgin, £7.99) is strictly for the anoraks, an attempt to save the phenomena of the *Doctor Who* TV series and embed into it Virgin Publishing's "New and Missing Adventures." Of course it's impossible to write a definitive history of the worlds of Dr Who. There is almost certainly more broadcast material in Dr Who than any other screen sf presentation, not excluding *Star Trek* and its symbionts and parasites. There are more characters, more events, more plot and more inconsistencies. Most of the stories are about time-travelling, historical paradoxes have frequently been part of the point and continuity has not always been a high priority for the makers of the series. (In fact, during some parts of the John Pertwee "UNIT" period continuity seemed to be a discipline of which the programme makers were entirely unaware)

But, all in all, not a bad job if you like that sort of thing. The one big problem is that Parkin has fallen into the trap of believing Gallifreyan propaganda! Everyone knows that the so-called "Time Lords," far from being the most ancient and glorious race in the galaxy were (or rather will be) a rather dingy group of shape-shifting chameleonoid swamp-dwelling bickering predators from the near future who, finding themselves in a galaxy dominated by humans and their Dalek descendants (that's the real reason everybody speaks English – it's the Daleks' native tongue) chose to use time travel to establish their rule in the past, back before the conquest, and are now stuck trying to bring off an utterly unsuitable role as Secret Masters of the Universe. Don't be fooled! The evidence speaks for itself!

Now what was that I said about anoraks?

Ken Brown

## BOOKS



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# So Little Time, So Much to Write...

Peter Crowther

What can you say about a man who, at a time when he could be just lying around sipping pina colodas and watching the interest build up on his investments, not only produces three substantial novels in a single year but also flies even further in the face of tradition and safety by having two of those novels flaunt conventional style?

Even when he's off form, Stephen King is a formidable and convincing literary stylist whose work never fails to reach a high entertainment level. But when he's on a roll, he has no equal. In this latest trio of works – two of which form a diptych of sorts – we find him surpassing even his own standards (*The Green Mile*), maintaining them (*Desperation*) and falling a good notch short (*The Regulators*). The best first.

Prolific as ever, King was making notes on the as-yet-untitled novel when he was supposed to be putting the finishing touches to his then-current epic (*Desperation*, on which more in a minute...), and with yet another book-idea waiting in the wings. For a time, it looked like the notes were going to end up in the trash... and then a business associate suggested he write the story in the great 19th-century tradition of monthly potboiler-novels.

This form of running a story on for many episodes – sometimes stretching into years! – was pioneered by the likes of Charles Dickens, although it enjoyed a brief resurgence in popularity in mid-20th century America in the pages of the *Saturday Evening Post*. King was hooked and *The Green Mile* was born. All six instalments have now been released – *The Two Dead Girls*, *The Mouse on the Mile*, *Coffey's Hands*, *The Bad Death of Eduard Delacroix*, *Night Journey* and *Coffey on the Mile* (Penguin, £1.99 each) – and the whole thing is exemplary, in terms of plotting, characterization and sheer story-telling.

*The Green Mile* takes its name from a corridor which leads from Cold Mountain Penitentiary's Death Row to the electric chair. The story is set in 1932, told in flashback (from the Georgia Pines Nursing Home) by a



now nonagenarian truer-than-steel former guard in a series of scribbled notebooks. It involves a group of men – killers and guards – who form an uneasy relationship in Cold Mountain's E Block while they all wait for execution dates to be announced. And while they wait, a whole series of painstakingly-detailed characterizations and pasts unfold, the significance of which, at least in the early stages, can only be guessed at. But we should know by now that even the most seemingly irrelevant information will have its part to play as things move on. And while things move on slowly, they do move... and, more to the point, the actual telling of the tale is superlative.

The narrator – one-time “bull screw” Paul Edgecombe – battles against an agonizing urinary infection; the sadistic but cowardly Percy Wetmore makes everyone's life a pure misery; the tiny, multiple-killer Eduard Delacroix befriends (or, more accurately, is befriended by) a mouse he christens Mr Jingles; Warden Hal Moore's wife Melinda experiences violent headaches; the maniacal Wild Billy Wharton determines to wreak an unrelenting blend of havoc; and the mild-mannered, man-mountain, convicted rapist-killer John Coffey keeps his own council... for now.

Meanwhile, back in the world of today – within the white walls of the Georgia Pines Nursing Home – the older and wiser Paul Edgecombe has what threatens to be a new battle on his hands... in the shape of the bullying male nurse Brad Dolan, an archetype of all that we read about going horribly wrong in homes which care for the aged. And while Edgecombe deals with the complicated cathartic process of getting the details of what happened all those years ago at Cold Mountain Penitentiary down in his notebooks, Dolan senses something going on and strives to put a stop to it. After all, these old bastards aren't supposed to be enjoying their final years – for that matter, they should be dead already. It soon becomes painfully clear that two confrontations are in the wind, albeit separated by more than half a century. There'll be tears before we're through!

Aside from the actual content of the story, King is at his most effective by the simple virtue of his writing. Each volume ends on a cliff-hanger in 1932 with the next instalment beginning in the present day in the old folks' home, where Edgecombe (King) brings us skilfully up to date with what went before while, equally skilfully, unveiling more and more about life in one of God's waiting rooms. Ever the consummate story-teller, King really has surpassed himself with some of his prose in *The Green Mile*, further confirming that the first-person narra-

tive is his strongest suit. Descriptions and similes that would put to shame all but the very finest from the old masters fall thick and fast from his pen:

*Old Sparky waited, as silent – and as eerie – as the throne in the castle of a dead king.*

and:

*Harry's nervous chuckles ceased, leaving him with a smile that hung on his mouth like a crooked shutter hangs on an empty house.*

Where so many of the big guns increasingly play it safe, King has rekindled the much-loved Saturday matinee mentality with this riveting serial of two incarcerations... one for those who have committed crimes against mankind and the other for those guilty of the equally heinous offence of growing old... and all couched neatly in his favourite packaging of the constant battle between good and evil.

In his afterword, King says that a repeat of the serial-thriller exercise is unlikely (“... if only because the critics get to kick your ass six times instead of just the once...”) which is a shame. The good news, however, is that any editing of the tale to make it suitable for a single volume is also unlikely. The whole essence of *The Green Mile*'s structure – the careful revelations of additional information, the narrator's teasing hints as to what lies ahead, and the highly effective blending of two timeframes – demands the episodic serialized format. Every story is something of a journey, with getting to the denouement (i.e. the destination) being the ultimate goal. With *The Green Mile*, however, it is the journey itself – spread over six months – that has been the most important element. If the story were to be collected into one omnibus volume, then maintaining the original presentation – with, perhaps, an emphasis on having the reader put the book down at the end of each section – is absolutely essential. It's often said that it's better to travel in hope than to arrive: maybe King sees it that way, too.

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It's certainly better to travel in hope on Highway 50 (reputedly America's loneliest stretch of blacktop) than it is to arrive in the tiny and appropriately named Nevada town of **Desperation** (Hodder & Stoughton, £16.99). Particularly when local highway cop Collie Entragian decides to pull you over to check your licence details.

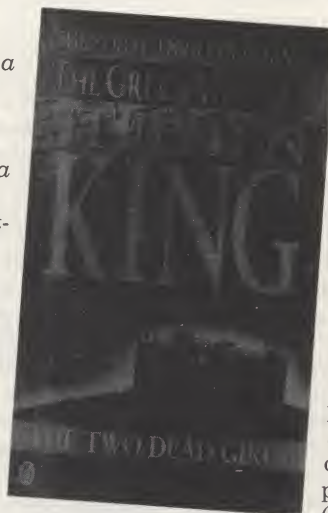
The thing is, Collie isn't feeling quite himself these days... as becomes quite obvious when, on taking Peter and Mary Jackson into town after finding a bag of marijuana (left there by Peter's sister, whose car they have borrowed) in the trunk, the cold-eyed lawman bites away half of his own lip

while he gives them their rights through the mesh screen between the front and back seats: for in addition to the usual stuff about remaining silent and providing a lawyer, Entragian calmly informs the couple that he's going to kill them.

Before long, the hard-working cop has assembled other examples of highway flotsam and jetsam in the cells of Desperation's small pokey: the Carver family (who started out as four but are now reduced to

three), Johnny Marinville (a one-time famous writer-cum-alcoholic whose last stab at regaining literary stature was to be a Steinbeck-type tome of rediscovering America by motorbike, entitled *Travels With Harley*) and an old man who may just be the last surviving member of Desperation's once-thriving population.

The plain truth of the matter is that the nearby mining project has uncovered more than combustible materials, precious metals or brittle slate. It has exposed a long-imprisoned force which needs a warm body to enable it to achieve its purpose. Unfortunately, this force has a somewhat debilitating effect on its “hosts” and so a steady supply is required... hence the “prisoners.” But there are other powers at work, here, with young David Carver in personal contact with God. And as they review their situation, this tiny band of walking wounded – increased by two with the arrival of Marinville's gopher, Steve, and a young punk-haired hitch-hiker called Cynthia – soon comes to an inescapable conclusion: they are here for a purpose. Before long, the inhospitable Nevada desert and the yawning mine-shaft which leads directly to the thing that controls Collie Entragian (and all of his successors) becomes a battlefield between the forces of good and evil, and not





everyone who enters the inevitable final confrontation will survive.

This trite-sounding scenario should not be allowed to put you off from buying *Desperation*, which proves to be King's best apocalyptic confrontation since *It*. Blending elements of his own back catalogue with themes from Jack Finney's *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* and John W. Campbell's "Who Goes There?", and stirring in some strikingly overt religious undertones of a cruel and manipulative God (reminiscent of Moorcock's ambivalent and capricious Lords of Chaos and Order, in the Eternal Champion canon) and the basic goodness of a humanity able to rise to impossible demands when the chips are down, King delivers a customarily thundering 545-page page-turner which, beneath all of the action, poses a few questions and suggests a few answers. Okay, maybe it isn't quite the Sermon on the Mount, but it's close enough for jazz. And it would be far more likely to win converts, too.

So far, so good. But not content with *two* books, King went for the hat-trick. The result – *The Regulators* (Hodder & Stoughton, £16.99), a "post-humous" publication of what may or may not be Richard Bachman's final novel – is something of an alternate take on the events detailed in King's own *Desperation*, substituting a suburban small-town setting for the wide-open spaces of the Nevada desert.

All of the character names from *Desperation* turn up in *The Regulators*, although personalities and roles differ. Thus Collie Entragian and Johnny Marinville are once again called up to do battle with the forces of evil... this time brought to the sleepy Ohio town of Wentworth by an autistic child who happened to visit the off-the-map Nevada town in which we've already spent some time. However, these books really are alternate takes and that could be where the first fault – the *main* one – lies. The genesis of the evil *spirit* Tak remains more or less the same in each book although in *The Regulators* it would have been better (to this reviewer) for the events in Wentworth to form a clean sequel. King was clearly in two minds how to tackle the basic premise for the story which evolved into *Desperation*. Either that or, part-way through *Desperation*, he had a thought as to how things might be if the evil power were to hit suburbia... his usual stomping ground (albeit moved a thousand miles or so westwards from the New England landscapes to which we've grown accustomed).

Thus *The Regulators* begins with a carefully described quiet street scene which soon deteriorates into mayhem with the arrival of a red van whose

occupant(s) roll down the window and shoot a boy delivering newspapers. And that's as calm as things are to be in Wentworth for some time. Pretty soon, other vans, equally gaudily-coloured, drive down Poplar Street blowing away anyone unfortunate (or just plain *foolish*) enough to be caught out of doors. Meanwhile, behind the shutters of Audrey Wyler's house, Audrey stands and listens to the havoc keeping a nervous eye on her young nephew Seph, of whom she has taken charge following the tragic drive-by shooting of his entire family while they were on vacation, an event that followed a traumatic visit to one old mine shaft in... yes, you guessed it.

From here on in, the action shifts between the laid-low survivors trying to come to terms with (a) the apparently meaningless carnage and the fact that help in the form of police and ambulance services fail to appear, and (b) the steadily changing landscape of Wentworth from a cosy suburb into something resembling a wild west town lifted straight from an old TV re-run of *Bonanza*, complete with some of the *strangest* coyotes that ever howled at a gibbous moon.

And here's where "Bachman" may have stretched his "cleverness" to almost unacceptably flamboyant and even self-indulgent levels. The story shifts viewpoint with sometimes dizzying – and occasionally detrimental – effect. First-person narratives – some culled from the notebook of the man at *Desperation*'s mineshaft, others from Audrey Wyler's diary – share jostled shoulder-space with third person... and newspaper and magazine clippings (shades of Moorcock's episodic Jerry Cornelius "story" *A Cure For Cancer*), hand-written postcards and letters (bringing to mind Ed McBain's early "evidence-ridden" 87th Precinct novels), and even extracts from a western movie (entitled *The Regulators*) which Seth and the entity which possesses him watch repeatedly on Audrey Wyler's TV set. And as if all that were not enough, the narrative changes from past to present tense whenever the killing machines go on the prowl.

The story bears strong traces of the old *Twilight Zone* episode "It's A Good Life" (reprised – less effectively – in the movie version), wherein a young boy is possessed of great powers

which he brings to bear on his immediate family. Okay, here we have a strong case of possession-itis to boot, but the basics are still the same... with the "family" extended to include an entire street. And there's also a kind of existential undertone wherein the mind (karma, soul, id... take your pick) of the possessed Seth communicates with that of his aunt by means of an imaginary (and suitably symbolic) telephone... and he does so far more coherently than he could ever hope to achieve by communicating with her verbally.

There's plenty of gore and entrails and blood for those people who have an affection for such things and, it has to be said, there's an extremely effective ending where everyone – the aunt, the "submerged" boy, the evil spirit and the token writer (Johnny Marinville) – seems to be engaged in an elaborate game of bluff and double bluff. There's also a nice round-up when the dust has settled and things start to return to normal, and an upbeat end-piece-cum-epilogue.

So that's it for another year: 1996 will undoubtedly – and rightly – go down in the records as a good year as far as King's fans are concerned and, particularly with *The Green Mile*, a hard act to follow for the big man himself. But one gets the feeling he just loves a challenge... and as there's nobody else that seems prepared or even *able* to pace him, well, he's clearly perfectly happy to do the job all on his own.

But while King may be the undisputed master of the page-turner, not even *he* can make a reader's flesh crawl quite so effectively as can Ramsey Campbell.

Campbell's strength is the ability to portray something seemingly spooky while at the same time reassuring the reader that it cannot be so... that there must surely be a more rational explanation. It's a neat trick and one on which he "wrote the book"... several, in fact. His latest, *The House on Nazareth Hill* (Headline, £16.99), is no exception.

With so many other writers in the field contenting themselves to tell the story straight, with all of its inherent unpleasantness openly and even painstakingly recorded, Campbell manages to heighten the tension by refusing to divulge too much of the "Monster": we know it's there but only because we learn of its passing... a creaking door or floorboard, a rustle in the dark, a strange and unfamiliar smell, a moving curtain or a fluttering sheet of paper. His characters shake their heads and put the minor disturbance down to wind or to a settling house or to cooking smells seeping through the walls from the house next door. But we know better. We

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know the Monster is there and, like every wide-eyed kid at a pantomime or sitting shivering at one of those old black-and-white movie masterpieces by William Castle, we long to shout out "It's behind you!"... to shriek "Get out of there!" But they never do, or at least... they don't until it's too late.

The real beauty of Campbell's work is that, like M. R. James, he writes ghost stories for people who do not believe in ghosts. He takes the most mundane and recognizable settings, the dimly-lit streets and parks and boarded-up buildings of the inner city, and places into them people with imaginations. These are troubled people, often innocent people, people upon whom the gods of irony conspire to unleash the unbelievable.

One of those people is 15-year-old Amy Priestley; another is her father, Oswald, still coming to terms with his wife's tragic death on a fog-bound motorway. A death for which Oswald holds himself responsible. When we meet the Priestleys, Amy is eight years old and her mother is still alive. They are passing the ruined mansion of Nazareth Hill, through whose smashed windows Amy has a terrifying vision of a rotting corpse reaching out for her. The experience stays with her and, seven years later, she is less than delighted when her father buys an apartment for the two of them in the expensively renovated complex which the mansion has now become.

No sooner are they in residence than Amy begins to see and hear and even smell things that she feels she should not be there. But, of course, each of her protestations is dismissed by her father who, it begins to seem, is succumbing to some strange spell exerted by the building. Determined to get to the bottom of things, Amy tries to trace the history of Nazareth Hill, which turns out at one time to have been a madhouse of Bedlam proportions... particularly where that infamous institution's standards of care and hygiene are concerned. During her investigations, she comes across an old bible, once owned by one of the unfortunate inmates, on the edges of whose pages the true horrors of life at Nazareth Hill have been carefully documented.

Meanwhile, the visions – peripheral scurrings and unexplained shadows – and sounds and smells increase, both in terms of their incidence and their intensity. The doors of empty apartments creak slowly open as Amy tries to pass them and she glimpses suggestions of shapes and faces peering out at her. And Amy is not alone in this. One or two of the other residents meet with untimely and inexplicable deaths, while others seem to conspire to spend more and more time away from the complex, either on holidays or visiting with friends.

And all the time, Amy's father grows more distant and more precise, his speech taking on the exactness and floridity of long-ago times and his attitude drifting inexorably into a kind of religious fanaticism.

Like Jack Torrance (*The Shining*), the increasingly zealous Oswald Priestley proves to be not only a fuel to the fires that burn on in the heart of Nazareth Hill but also a conduit for their power. And as both he and his daughter reach the grisly truth of Nazareth Hill – albeit from different directions – they do so only as combatants. By which time the complex's population has increased considerably... with Nazareth Hill's former residents once more walking – or *crawling* – its corridors. Campbell's prose is, as ever, packed with mood and almost visionary description, and *The House on Nazareth Hill* continues to excite and reveal to the very last page. Absolutely first class.

Sadly, the same cannot be said of Simon Clark's *Darker* (Hodder & Stoughton, £16.99), which also features a young girl called Amy (this time, four years old) at the core of its unpleasantness. For his third novel, Clark pulls out the stops with a story of a family forced to race around the country in their car, while a monstrous invisible creature (reminiscent of the Id beast from *Forbidden Planet*) trundles on behind them with the singular aim of grinding them all into the ground.

The situation comes about from them happening across Michael, a would-be world ruler of Lex Luthor proportions, who, by simple force of mind, learned how to control the aforementioned mind-beast during a protracted stay in Turkey. Everything was fine while he was in Turkey, but once he decided to come home to England, the beast broke the mental "leash" and tried to savage him like a grumpy puppy... albeit a grumpy

puppy capable of flattening tall buildings in a single bound.

When first they meet him, the hapless Young family have no idea that the plausible Michael is in any way possessed of nefarious intentions, and they buy his story – with its unpleasant (for them) postscript that, simply by having spent time with him, the monster has their "scent" too – they set off for Michael's country retreat where, he assures them, his "people" have the solution both to release the family from their bond and once more tether the creature to Michael's will.

But Michael has a motive other than the family's safety in his insistence that they stick together. Indeed, we learn that controlling the beast is a pretty demanding task which requires an almost constant singularity of mind and will... a process so exhausting and draining that anyone Michael signs up for the job has a very limited life expectancy – even assuming the thing accepts their attempt at the "mind-meld" without

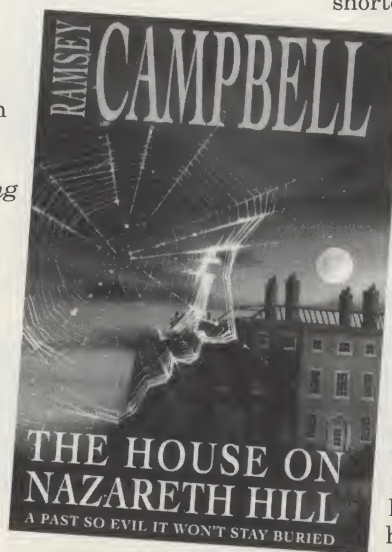
shortening them by all but 0.00001% of their full height.

Nevertheless, one of Michael's earlier shots at filling the position did not end completely sourly for the would-be "applicant"... although the girl, a teenager named Rosemary Snow, is pretty fed up with the way the beast – and Michael – left her for dead. The up-side of the confrontation, however, is that, in addition to a face full of stitches, pains in every part of her body plus a headache that would put the worst hangover

imaginable to shame, Rosemary wakes up in a hospital bed with something new: the ability to form a telepathic link with anyone close to Michael. Thus able to track them, she sets off in pursuit of both Michael and the pursuing puppy hell-bent on getting her own back. Preferably before Michael serves up young Amy as the beast's constant companion.

*Darker's* downside is that it fails to deliver when the chips are down. Not only do we never actually get to see the thing in all of its glory and are not ultimately rewarded with a believable solution, but the clipped and almost breathless prose – clearly aimed at promoting speed and urgency – actually emphasizes these shortcomings. The fact is that it's not enough simply to tell the reader he or she is excited and/or having a good time: one has to make them feel that they really are.

Peter Crowther





The following is a list of all sf, fantasy and horror titles, and books of related interest, received by Interzone during the month specified above. Official publication dates, where known, are given in italics at the end of each entry. Descriptive phrases in quotes following titles are taken from book covers rather than title pages. A listing here does not preclude a separate review in this issue (or in a future issue) of the magazine.

Baker, Will. **Star Beast**. New English Library, ISBN 0-340-65774-X, 472pp, A-format paperback, cover by Mick van Houten, £5.99. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1996; Baker's second sf book [with a purloined Robert A. Heinlein title], a follow-up to his *Shadow Hunter*.) 19th September 1996.

Belle, Pamela. **Blood Imperial**. Severn House, ISBN 0-7278-5112-8, 424pp, hardcover, £17.99. (Fantasy novel, first edition; third in the trilogy which began with *The Silver City* and *The Wolf Within*; this library hardcover edition is published "by arrangement with Pan Books," who presumably have a paperback version due imminently.) 26th September 1996.

Blunt, James. **Utopia Revisited**. Merlin [40 East St., Braintree, Devon EX33 2EA], ISBN 0-86303-746-1, 140pp, small-press paperback, £6.95. (Sf/utopian novel, first edition; serious-minded and old-fashioned, it's written in traditional dialogue style, but it does not appear to be a direct sequel to Sir Thomas More's masterpiece; for some reason, Blunt's traveller-interlocutor [his equivalent of Raphael Hythloday] is a Russian called "Captain Ivan Raskalnikoff" [sic] but whether this name is intended as an allusion to Dostoevsky's *Crime and Punishment* is not made clear; we're told nothing about the author, but presumably this is a debut book by a not-so-young British writer – it shows signs of having been written years ago.) No date shown: received in August 1996.

Bonanno, Margaret Wander. **Preternatural**. Tor, ISBN 0-312-86209-1, 352pp, hardcover, \$23.95. (Sf novel, first edition; proof copy received; about an sf writer whose alien creations communicate with

her, it's described as "a mind-warping reality trip in the tradition of Philip K. Dick.") December 1996.

Bradbury, Ray. **Quicker Than the Eye**. Avon, ISBN 0-380-97380-4, viii+261pp, hardcover, \$22.

(Sf/fantasy/mainstream collection, first edition; proof copy received; a new Bradbury collection is a rare but predictable event [it has been eight years since his last, *The Toynebee Convector*]; he hasn't changed much in 50 years; this volume contains 21 stories, almost all of them recent, i.e. first published in the 1990s [although one, "The Electrocutation," is a previously uncollected tale from 1946 – you need to have access to a detailed bibliography to learn this, however, as the book contains no publication credits]; there is also a four-page afterword by the author in which he describes his own "boundless enthusiasm" and the daily jolts of inspiration that he receives; heartwarming stuff.) 7th November 1996.

Brenchley, Chaz. **Dispossession**. Hodder & Stoughton, ISBN 0-340-65991-2, 378pp, hardcover, £15.99. (Horror novel, first edition; the author's seventh novel as Brenchley, although we are told that he also writes as "Daniel Fox.") 21st September 1996.

Brin, David. **Infinity's Shore: Book Two of a new Uplift Trilogy**. Bantam/Spectra, ISBN 0-553-10173-0, xii+523pp, hardcover, \$23.95. (Sf novel, first edition; proof copy received.) November 1996.

Carroll, Jerry Jay. **Top Dog**. Ace, ISBN 0-441-00368-0, 330pp, trade paperback, cover by Joseph Daniel Fiedler, \$12. (Fantasy novel, first edition; a debut novel by a new American writer, in which a wheeler-dealer businessman is transformed into a big dog and has to learn new kinds of survival skills; the intention may be satirical: one can't help feeling that a British equivalent would have been more likely to be entitled *Fat Cat*.) 1st September 1996.

## BOOKS RECEIVED



AUGUST  
1996

Carty, Jon. **The Wintermann Weekend**. Pentland Press [1 Hut-ton Close, South Church, Bishop Auckland, Durham DL14 6XB], ISBN 1-85821-402-5, 311pp, B-format paperback, cover by Geoff Hobbs, £5.99.

(Horror novel, first edition; a debut book by a new British writer, born 1957.) No date shown: received in August 1996.

Chapman, Vera. **The Three Damosels**. Gollancz, ISBN 0-575-06150-2, 383pp, hardcover, £16.99. (Arthurian fantasy omnibus, first published in 1978; proof copy received; the three novels it contains, *The Green Knight*, *The King's Damosel* and *King Arthur's Daughter*, were first published separately in 1975-76; the author died earlier this year, aged 98; we're told that the trilogy will form the basis of "a full-length cartoon by Warner Bros," with "the voice of Christopher Reeve as King Arthur," scheduled for 1997.) 14th November 1996.

Clarke, Arthur C. **The Snows of Olympus: A Garden on Mars**. Gollancz, ISBN 0-575-06322-X, 120pp, very large-format paperback, cover by John Hinkley, £12.99. (Illustrated study of the planet Mars, and speculation on its possible future colonization; first published in 1994; an attractive book, many of its images computer-generated by the author and John Hinkley.) 29th August 1996.

Evans, David. **Time Station London**. Ace, ISBN 0-441-00364-8, 249pp, A-format paperback, cover by Jeff Walker, \$5.99. (Sf novel, first edition; the first of a series, it's copyright "Bill Fawcett and Associates"; apparently by a British writer [though it may be pastiche British], it sounds rather like *Doctor Who* without the Doctor: "Steven Whitefeather, Master Temporal Warden, is sent to 1940 London...") 1st September 1996.

Gilman, Laura Anne, and Keith R. A. DeCandido, eds. **Otherwhere: Stories of Transformation**. Ace, ISBN 0-441-00363-X, x+260pp, A-format

paperback, cover by Linda Messier, \$5.99. (Fantasy anthology, first edition; it contains all-new stories about shape-changing and metamorphosis by Greg Cox, Peter David, Esther M. Friesner, Craig Shaw Gardner, Nina Kiriki Hoffman, Jody Lynn Nye, R. A. Salvatore, Josepha Sherman and others.) 1st September 1996.

Holt, Tom. **Expecting Someone Taller**. Ace, ISBN 0-441-22332-X, 231pp, A-format paperback, cover by James Warhola, \$5.50. (Humorous fantasy novel, first published in the UK, 1987; fourth Ace printing.) 1st September 1996.

Hughes, Rhys H. **Eyelidiad**. Illustrated by Alan Casey. Tanager [52 Denman Lane, Huncote, Leicester LE9 3BS], ISBN 0-9527183-2-4, 138pp, small-press paperback, cover by Casey, £5.99. (Fantasy novel, first edition; the author is British, born 1966, and has previously published a collection called *Worming the Harpy* [Tartarus Press, 1992].) No date shown: received in August 1996.

Jones, Diana Wynne. **Minor Arcana**. Gollancz, ISBN 0-575-06325-4, 287pp, hardcover, £16.99. (Fantasy collection, first edition; proof copy received; six stories and a novel-la.) 14th November 1996.

Jones, Stephen, ed. **The Best New Horror: Volume Seven**. Raven, ISBN 1-85487-464-0, xi+592pp, B-format paperback, cover by Luis Rey, £6.99. (Horror anthology, first edition; it contains reprint stories by Alan Brennert, Ramsey Campbell, Terry Dowling, Christopher Fowler, Neil Gaiman, Stephen Gallagher, Thomas Ligotti, Paul J. McAuley, Ian R. MacLeod, Graham Masterton, Nicholas Royle, Michael Marshall Smith, Lisa Tuttle, Cherry Wilder and others, including the short novel "The Hunger and Ecstasy of Vampires" by Brian Stableford, from *Interzone*; recommended, both for its many good stories and for its by-now-famous if morbid "Necrology" [by Steve Jones and Kim Newman] – the most exhaustive listing available anywhere of all those associated with horror, fantasy and sf who have died in the past year.) 16th September 1996.



Joyce, Graham. **The Tooth Fairy**. Signet, ISBN 0-451-18435-1, 342pp, A-format paperback, £5.99. (Horror novel, first edition; the accompanying publicity sheet says: "a major paperback original for Signet, *The Tooth Fairy* has been submitted for the Booker Prize, and W. H. Smith has already taken 10,000 samples" – it's not clear what the publishers mean by the last remark: have they given away 10,000 copies to bookshop staff?; nor is it clear what they mean when they say on the review slip "Trade Publication 6th September 1996; General Publication 26th September 1996": is there a separate trade paperback edition? – possibly, but if so we are not told its price; or perhaps 6th September was the date they issued their 10,000 freebies to booksellers?; whatever the answers to these minor mysteries, we wish Graham well and hope that this is indeed his "breakthrough" book.) 26th September 1996.

Kilworth, Garry. **House of Tribes**. Corgi, ISBN 0-552-14111-9, 430pp, A-format paperback, cover and internal illustrations by Paul Robinson, £4.99. (Animal fantasy novel, first published in 1995; reviewed by Chris Gilmore in *Interzone* 103.) 12th September 1996.

Kilworth, Garry. **A Midsummer's Nightmare**. Bantam Press, ISBN 0-593-04029-5, 325pp, hardcover, cover and internal illustrations by Stephen Player, £14.99. (Humorous fantasy novel, first edition; perhaps we should have listed this under "Spinoffery," since it's a sequel of sorts to Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, set in the present day but involving the Bard's fairy characters; for a writer of quality, Kilworth has been prolific in recent years, with novels from HarperCollins, Bantam Press, Gollancz and Little, Brown [not to mention kids' books from other imprints]; we've made the claim a couple of times lately that "Kilworth has changed publisher again" – but it seems we were wrong: no one publishing house can contain him, and he just keeps adding further publishers to his ongoing tally!) 12th September 1996.

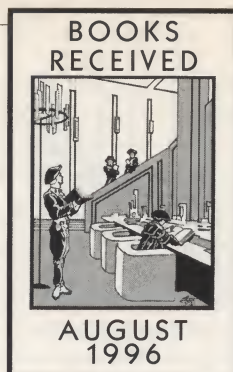
Langford, Dave. **The Silence of the Langford: Essays (and Some Stories)**. Introduction by Teresa Nielsen Hayden. "This volume contains – slightly revised – Dave Langford's Hugo-nominated chapbook *Let's Hear It for the Deaf Man* (NESFA Press, 1992) plus more than 200 pages of additional material, never before collected." NESFA Press [PO Box 809, Framingham, MA 01701-0203, USA], ISBN 0-915368-62-5, viii+278pp, trade paperback, cover by John D. Rickett, \$15. (Humorous collection of essays, speeches and a few stories; first edition; a definitive Langford compendium which recycles some old favourites [e.g. the 12 columns he wrote for *Million* magazine] and much else from fannish and not-so-fannish sources; brilliant stuff – I've just re-read the critique of Stephen R. Donaldson's prose style, so excuse me while I wipe away the tears of laughter...) September 1996.

McAuley, Paul J. **Fairyland**. Avon, ISBN 0-380-78675-3, 360pp, trade paperback, \$12.50. (Sf novel, first published in the UK, 1995; winner of the Arthur C. Clarke Award; proof copy received; there is a simultaneous hardcover edition [not seen]; reviewed by James Lovegrove in *Interzone* 99.) October 1996.

McAuley, Paul J. **Fairyland**. Vista, ISBN 0-575-60031-4, 416pp, A-format paperback, cover by Paul Young, £5.99. (Sf novel, first published in 1995.) 26th September 1996.

McKillip, Patricia A. **The Book of Atrix Wolfe**. Ace, ISBN 0-441-00361-3, 247pp, A-format paperback, cover by Kinuko Y. Craft, \$5.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1995; the cover is a striking Pre-Raphaelite pastiche; and the prose is pretty – as we would expect from this World Fantasy Award-winning author.) 1st September 1996.

MacLeod, Ken. **The Star Fraction**. Legend, ISBN 0-09-955881-5, 341pp, B-format paperback, cover by Angus McK-



ie, £5.99. (Sf novel, first published in 1995; a debut book by a new Scottish writer, it was runner-up in this year's Arthur C. Clarke Award; reviewed by Paul McAuley in *Interzone* 100.) 5th September 1996.

MacLeod, Ken. **The Stone Canal**. Legend, ISBN 0-09-955891-2, 322pp, hardcover, cover by Chris Moore, £15.99. (Sf novel, first edition; the author's second book.) 5th September 1996.

Masterton, Graham. **The House That Jack Built**. Carroll & Graf, ISBN 0-7867-0353-9, 385pp, hardcover, \$24. (Horror novel, first published in the UK, 1996; apparently the British edition appeared from Heinemann earlier this year, but we never saw it.) 14th October 1996.

Moorcock, Michael. **Behold the Man: The Thirtieth Anniversary Edition**. Illustrations by John Picacio. Foreword by Jonathan Carroll. Mojo Press [PO Box 140005, Austin, TX 78714, USA], ISBN 1-885418-05-1, ix+129pp, hardcover, cover by Picacio, \$12.95. (Sf novella, first edition; originally published in *New Worlds*, 1966, then expanded as a full-length novel, 1969; this first separate book publication of the original [but "corrected"] shorter text has a new 13-page afterword by the author; distributed in the UK by Jayde Design [i.e. John and Maureen Davey, 45 St Mary's Mansions, St Mary's Terrace, London W2 1SH] at £9.95.) No date shown: received in August 1996.

Moorcock, Michael. **Blood: A Southern Fantasy**. Avonova, ISBN 0-380-78078-X, 337pp, B-format paperback, cover by Bill Binger, \$12. (Sf/fantasy novel, first published in the UK, 1995; reviewed by Dave Kendall in *Interzone* 92.) September 1996.

Moorcock, Michael. **The War Amongst the Angels: A Sequel to Blood and Fabulous Harbours. An Autobiographical Story**. Orion/Millennium, ISBN 1-85798-410-2, 247pp, hardcover, cover by Gustav Moreau, £16.99. (Sf/fantasy novel, first edition; there is a simultaneous C-for-

mat paperback edition [not seen]; it's dedicated to the memories of Harrison Ainsworth, Captain Marryat, George Meredith and Gerald Kersh – a mixed bunch!) 16th September 1996.

Niles, Douglas. **Darkenheight**. "Book Two of *The Watershed Trilogy*." Ace, ISBN 0-441-00333-8, 408pp, trade paperback, cover by Ciruelo Cabral, \$13.95. (Fantasy novel, first edition; it's the sequel to a volume entitled *Breach in the Watershed*, which we never saw; like Weis & Hickman, like R. A. Salvatore, Niles is a graduate of the school of TSR and DragonLance.) 1st September 1996.

Niven, Larry, Jerry Pournelle and Steven Barnes. **The Dragons of Heorot**. Orbit, ISBN 1-85723-373-5, 594pp, A-format paperback, cover by Fred Gambino, £6.99. (Sf novel, first published in the UK, 1995; sequel to the same authors' *The Legacy of Heorot*; the see John Clute's cod review of an imaginary third novel in the series, *Interzone* 94.) 5th September 1996.

Pollack, Rachel. **Godmother Night: A Novel**. Abacus, ISBN 0-349-10836-6, 355pp, C-format paperback, £9.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1996; proof copy received.) 7th November 1996.

Pratchett, Terry. **Hogfather**. Gollancz, ISBN 0-575-06403-X, 286pp, hardcover, cover by Josh Kirby, £15.99. (Humorous fantasy novel, first edition; proof copy received; the 20th "Discworld" novel, this one seems to be about that world's equivalent of Santa Claus.) 7th November 1996.

Priest, Christopher. **The Affirmation**. Touchstone, ISBN 0-684-81614-8, 213pp, B-format paperback, cover by Holly Warburton, £6.99. (Fantasy novel [well ... like the author's later titles below, it's a psychological fantasy-mystery-sf-unclassifiable novel – let's say *Priestian*], first published in 1981; this edition contains a new author's preface.) 16th September 1996.

Priest, Christopher. **The Glamour: Revised Edition**. Touchstone, ISBN 0-684-81615-6, 326pp, B-format paperback, cover by Holly Warburton, £6.99. (Fantasy novel, first pub-



lished in 1984; this edition has been extensively worked over, and now incorporates scenes Priest wrote for the BBC radio dramatization; it's still one of his best novels: recommended.) *16th September 1996.*

Priest, Christopher. **The Prestige.** Touchstone, ISBN 0-684-81755-1, 404pp, B-format paperback, cover by Holly Warburton, £6.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in 1995; winner of the James Tait Black Memorial Prize for fiction; reviewed, glowingly, by John Clute in *Interzone* 101.) *16th September 1996.*

Pringle, David. **Imaginary People: A Who's Who of Fictional Characters from the Eighteenth Century to the Present Day.** 2nd edition. Scholar Press, ISBN 1-85928-162-1, x+296pp, hardcover, £29.95. (Annotated A-Z of fictional persons, drawn from many genres and media including sf, fantasy and horror; the first edition appeared in 1987; this new version, though much expanded, is set in double columns with smaller print and no illustrations – hence the lower page count; nothing has been dropped, many of the older entries have been updated or rewritten, and over a hundred new characters have been added: examples are Beavis & Butt-Head, Crocodile Dundee, Gordon Gekko, Forrest Gump, Hannibal Lecter, Rab C. Nesbitt, Ellen Ripley, Bart Simpson and V. I. Warshawski; a "Creators' Index" has also been added for this edition.) *September 1996.*

Ransom, Bill. **Burn: A Novel.** Ace, ISBN 0-441-00362-1, 315pp, A-format paperback, \$5.99. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1995; it's a 21st-century thriller about an artificial viral plague.) *1st September 1996.*

Rusch, Kristine Kathryn. **The Changeling: The Second Book of the Fey.** Bantam/Spectra, ISBN 0-553-56895-7, 611pp, B-format (?) paperback, \$5.99. (Fantasy novel, first edition; proof copy received; the near-simultaneous British edition was listed here some months ago as *The Fey: The Changeling.*) *Late entry: 13th May publication, received in August 1996.*

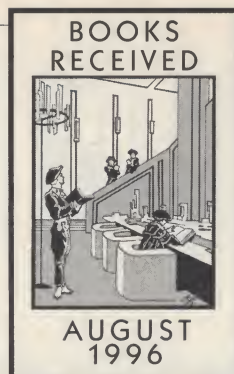
Shirley, John. **City Come A-Walkin'.** Foreword by William Gibson. Eyeball Books [PO Box 18539, Asheville, NC 28814, USA], ISBN 0-9642505-1-9, 216pp, trade paperback, cover by Rick Berry, \$10.

(Sf/horror novel, first published in 1980; this new edition has been revised – though probably lightly, as it doesn't seem any longer than the original; "I was somewhat chagrined, rereading it recently, to see just how much of my own early work takes off from this one novel," states Gibson.) *Late entry: June publication, received in August 1996.*

Shirley, John. **The Exploded Heart.** Foreword by Bruce Sterling. Eyeball Books [PO Box 18539, Asheville, NC 28814, USA], ISBN 0-9642505-0-0, 309pp, trade paperback, cover by Rick Berry, \$10. (Sf/fantasy collection, first edition; it contains stories and song lyrics which "span a 24-year period ... linked with searingly honest autobiographical introductions written especially for this volume"; this book is the authentic bad-mannered Shirley, and probably more representative of his talent and appeal than the earlier well-behaved collection *Heatseeker.*) *Late entry: June publication, received in August 1996.*

Smith, Guy N. **Writing Horror Fiction.** A. & C. Black, ISBN 0-7136-4339-0, 108pp, trade paperback, £8.99. (How-to manual, first edition; by a well-known British horror novelist, this is a companion volume to Sarah Lefanu's *Writing Fantasy Fiction*, listed here a couple of months ago; unfortunately, Smith's critical prose does not measure up to Lefanu's; all the same, parts of this book are interesting as a "testament" by a very prolific horror-merchant.) *31st August 1996.*

Springer, Nancy. **Fair Peril.** Avon, ISBN 0-380-78413-0, 246pp, trade paperback, \$12. (Fantasy novel, first edition; proof copy received; there is a simultaneous hardcover edition



[not seen].) *November 1996.*

Stephensen-Payne, Phil. **James Blish: Author Mirabilis—A Working Bibliography.** "Galactic Central Bibliographies for the Avid Reader, Volume 46." Galactic Central Publications

[25A Copgrove Rd., Leeds LS8 2SP], ISBN 1-871133-46-7, ix+161pp, small-press paperback, £7. (Sf author bibliography, first edition; this is a proper, perfect-bound paperback volume – a vast improvement in format over the old quarto-sized booklets in the series; an accompanying letter brings the sad news that Gordon Benson, Jr – Phil Stephensen-Payne's long-standing American collaborator – died recently.) *August 1996.*

Stephensen-Payne, Phil, and Gordon Benson, Jr. **Anne McCaffrey: Dragon Lady and More—A Working Bibliography.** 4th edition. "Galactic Central Bibliographies for the Avid Reader, Volume 13." Galactic Central Publications [25A Copgrove Rd., Leeds LS8 2SP], ISBN 1-871133-47-5, ix+54pp, small-press paperback, £4. (Sf author bibliography; earlier editions were published in 1984, 1986 and 1989; this one is saddle-stitched rather than perfect-bound, but it's in the new A5 size rather than the old quarto size.) *August 1996.*

Tonkin, Peter. **The Action.** Severn House, ISBN 0-7278-4983-2, 215pp, hardcover, £15.99. (Near-future thriller, first edition; it's set in 1997, and involves naval shenanigans surrounding the return of Hong Kong to Chinese rule; the Northern Irish author [born 1950] has written at least nine previous books, most of them seafaring adventures, as well as one horror novel that we know of – *The Journal of Edwin Underhill* [1981].) *22nd August 1996.*

Turtledove, Harry. **Worldwar: Striking the Balance.** Del Rey, ISBN 0-345-40550-1, ix+465pp, hardcover, cover by Stan Watts, \$23. (Alternative-history sf novel, first edition; proof copy received; conclusion to the tetralogy begun with *Worldwar: In the Balance*, *Worldwar: Tilting the Balance* and *Worldwar: Upsetting the Balance*.) *December 1996.*

Webb, Don. **A Spell for the Fulfillment of Desire.** Black Ice Books [c/o FC2, Unit for Contemporary Literature, Campus Box 4241, Illinois State University, Normal, IL 61790-4241, USA], ISBN 1-57366-012-4, 147pp, small-press paperback, cover by Aubrey Beardsley, \$7.95.



(Sf/fantasy/unclassifiable collection, first edition; it's an attractive small-format volume containing 27 stories, mostly very short,

many of them reprinted from small-press magazines and some of them original to the book; one story, "The Literary Fruitcake," appears in this issue of *Interzone*; recommended.) *No date shown: received in August 1996.*

Weis, Margaret, and Don Perrin. **The Knights of the Black Earth.** Vista, ISBN 0-575-60037-3, 383pp, A-format paperback, cover by Les Edwards, £5.99. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1995; the first in a sequence, it's a work of sub-*Star Wars* space-operatics set in the universe of Weis's earlier "Star of the Guardians" series.) *25th August 1996.*

Weis, Margaret, and Don Perrin. **Robot Blues: The Knights of the Black Earth, Volume II.** Gollancz, ISBN 0-575-06168-5, 382pp, hardcover, cover by Les Edwards, £16.99. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1996.) *25th August 1996.*

Wells, Angus. **Exile's Challenge: Book Two of the Exiles Saga.** Bantam/Spectra, ISBN 0-553-37812-0, 481pp, trade paperback, cover by Stephen Youll, \$12.95. (Fantasy novel, first edition.) *November 1996.*



Williams, A. Susan, and Richard Glyn Jones, eds. **The Penguin Book of Modern Fantasy by Women.** Introduction by Joanna Russ. Penguin, ISBN 0-14-024336-4, xiv+560pp, B-format paperback, cover by Leonora Carrington, £8.99. (Fantasy anthology, first published in 1995; mainly reprint stories by a host of names one might expect: Aiken, Atwood, Brackett, Butler, Carter, Charanas, du Maurier, Emshwiller, Gentle, Le Guin, Lee, McIntyre, Russ, Saxton, Tiptree, Tuttle, Wilhelm, etc; plus a few more

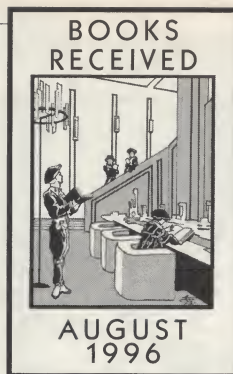
Anderson, Kevin J., and Rebecca Moesta. **Jedi Under Siege.** "Star Wars: Young Jedi Knights." Boulevard, ISBN 1-57297-163-0, 230pp, A-format paperback, \$5.99. (Young-adult sf movie spinoff novel, first edition; the authors are husband and wife, and this is one [the sixth?] of an ongoing series by them; "Boulevard" is a juvenile imprint of the Berkley Publishing Group [who also own Ace Books].) 1st September 1996.

Betancourt, John Gregory. **The Heart of the Warrior.** "Star Trek: Deep Space Nine, #17." Pocket, ISBN 0-671-00239-2, 274pp, A-format paperback, £4.50. (Sf TV-series spinoff novel, first published in the USA, 1996; this is the American first edition with a British price added.) October 1996.

Bucher-Jones, Simon. **The Death of Art.** "Doctor Who: The New Adventures." Virgin/Doctor Who, ISBN 0-426-20481-6, 276pp, A-format paperback, cover by Jon Sullivan, £4.99. (Sf television-series spinoff novel, first edition; this one appears to be a debut book by a new British writer; it's set mainly in 19th-century Paris, and features Charles Dickens as a character.) 12th September 1996.

Bulis, Christopher. **Twilight of the Gods.** "Doctor Who: The Missing Adventures." Virgin/Doctor Who, ISBN 0-426-20480-8, 299pp, A-format paperback, cover by Alister Pearson, £4.99. (Sf television-series spinoff novel, first edition.) 12th September 1996.

surprising names, such as Christine Brooke-Rose, Leonora Carrington [writer as well as artist], Janet Frame, P. D. James, Anna Kavan, Suniti Namjoshi, Ann Oakley, Muriel Spark, Fay Weldon, and so on; several of the stories are actually sf rather than fantasy, e.g. McCaffrey's "The Ship Who Sang" and Hilary Bailey's "The Fall of Frenchy Steiner"; a good anthology for the mainstream au-



dience, but to the longtime sf/fantasy reader much of it may seem over-familiar.) 29th August 1996.

Williamson, Philip G. **Enchantment's Edge: The Orb and the Spectre, Volume I.** Hodder &

Stoughton, ISBN 0-340-66668-4, 376pp, hardcover, cover by Jon Sullivan, £16.99. (Fantasy novel, first edition; a change of publisher and the launch of a

new series for this British author [born 1955] who has written at least six previous fantasies.) 5th September 1996.

Wood, Barbara. **Yesterday's Child.** Severn House, ISBN 0-7278-5125-X, 254pp, hardcover, £15.99. (Romantic horror novel, first published in the USA, 1979; the British-born American-resident author [born 1947] has written many novels of a similar stamp, with titles like *Childsong*, *The Dreaming* and *Soul Flame*; she has also written romances as "Kathryn Harvey.") 22nd August 1996.

## Spinoffery

*This is a list of all books received that fall into those sub-types of sf, fantasy and horror which may be termed novelizations, recursive fictions, spinoffs, sequels by other hands, shared worlds and sharecrops (including non-fiction about shared worlds, films and TV, etc.). The collective term "Spinoffery" is used for the sake of brevity.*

Daley, Brian. **Return of the Jedi: The National Public Radio Dramatization.** "Star Wars." Introduction by Anthony Daniels. Del Rey, ISBN 0-345-40782-2, xvii+184pp, B-format paperback, \$11. (Sf movie spinoff radio script, "based on characters and situations created by George Lucas"; first edition; proof copy received; for the benefit of British readers, National Public Radio, or NPR, is the shrunken American equivalent of BBC Radio – i.e. U.S. government-funded broadcasting; George Lucas generously sold them the radio dramatization rights to his "Star Wars" trilogy for one dollar per film; the first serial was broadcast in 1981; the second went on air in 1983; the third, this one, was much delayed because of cut-backs in NPR's funding but seems to have gone out this year; adapter Brian Daley died in March 1996.) December 1996.

Howe, David J., and Mark Stammers. **Doctor Who: Companions.** Virgin/Doctor Who, ISBN 0-86369-921-9, 124pp, very large-format paperback, £12.99. (Illustrated companion to the *Doctor Who* TV series, dealing with all the Doctor's glamorous female sidekicks; first published in 1995.) 19th September 1996.

Johnson, George Clayton. **Twilight Zone: Scripts & Stories.** Streamline Pictures [2908 Nebraska Ave., Santa Monica, CA 90404, USA], ISBN 1-57300-055-8, xiii+206pp, trade paperback, \$12.95. (Story and script collection, all pertaining to the sf/fantasy TV series *The Twilight Zone*; first published in a 100-copy limited edition entitled *Scripts and Stories Written for The Twilight Zone*, 1977; this first generally available edition has a new preface by the author; after Rod Serling and Richard Matheson, Johnson was one of the most important contributors to the famous late 1950s-early 1960s series; several of his scripts and original stories appear here in their unadapted first form, i.e. not as broadcast.) August 1996.

Jordan, Robert. **Conan the Defender.** Legend, ISBN 0-09-970401-3, 184pp, A-format paperback, cover by Fred Gambino, £4.99. (Sequel-by-another-hand fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1982 [not "1996," as the publishers imply]; this UK edition mentions the hero's original creator, Robert E. Howard, nowhere; "Robert Jordan" is a pseudonym of James O. Rigney, Jr.) 5th September 1996.

Kube-McDowell, Michael P. **Shield of Lies: The Black Fleet Crisis, Book Two.** "Star

Wars." Bantam, ISBN 0-553-50479-7, 340pp, A-format paperback, cover by Drew Struzan, £4.99. (Sf movie spinoff novel, first published in the USA, 1996.) 12th September 1996.

Pratchett, Terry. **The Pratchett Portfolio.** Illustrated by Paul Kidby. Gollancz, ISBN 0-575-06348-3, unpaginated, very large-format paperback, cover by Kidby, £7.99. (Who's who of characters from Pratchett's "Discworld" fantasy series, first edition; the text is by Pratchett, but it's a very slim volume, and really more of an art portfolio: the characters' faces are well drawn.) 26th September 1996.

Taylor, Jeri. **Mosaic: A Novel.** "Star Trek: Voyager." Pocket, ISBN 0-671-56311-4, 312pp, hardcover, cover by Keith Birdsong, £12.99. (Sf TV-series spinoff novel, first published in the USA, 1996; this, the first *Voyager* hardcover, is the life story of Captain Kathryn Janeway; the author is "co-creator and executive producer" of the series; this is the American first edition with a British price printed on the flap – it looks as though Simon & Schuster/Pocket are now achieving simultaneous publication for these books on both sides of the Atlantic, without delays and messy sticker-over labels.) October 1996.

Tine, Robert. **Eraser.** Signet, ISBN 0-451-19615-5, 233pp, A-format paperback, £5.99. (Sf movie novelization, first published in the USA, 1996; based on the screenplay by Tony Puryear and Walon Green for the film directed by Charles Russell and starring Arnold Schwarzenegger.) 23rd August 1996.



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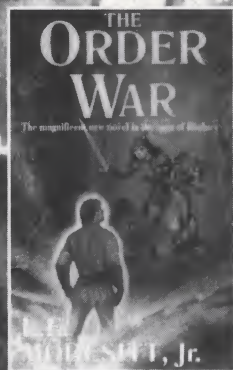
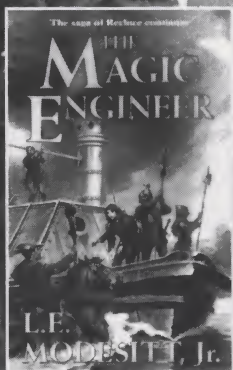
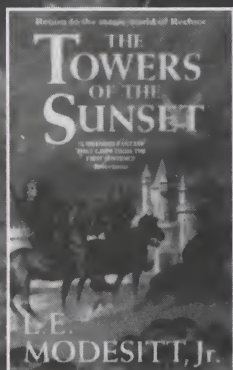
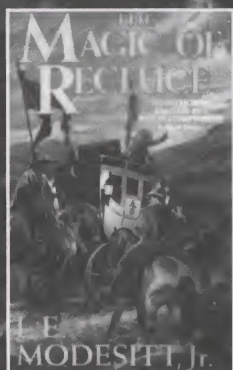
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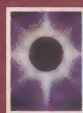
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